

The Transient and Transcendental
in *Timon of Athens*

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Abstract

This thesis deals with one of Shakespeare's most obscure plays, *The Life of Timon of Athens*, asking what new approaches may be taken to the play, in order to better appreciate its themes and poetic depiction. This play has often been viewed as an economic work and as a critique of wealth. However there are other legitimate approaches to the play, and other aspects of the work which tend to be overlooked in its prominent critical commentary.

The economic factors in the play's themes are clearly present, and this thesis will analyze the play in relation to aspects of its Jacobean economic context, as well as in relation to significant paradigms of Renaissance England. This thesis will also explore whether *The Life of Timon of Athens* is in fact far more than an economic work.

The following pages will provide an analysis of the play's poetry and its historical context, together with literary, artistic and philosophical traditions which may have influenced the work. When such factors are taken into account, *The Life of Timon of Athens* becomes a play with added dimensions, its thematic constituents extending well beyond economic aspects alone.

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Introduction

William Shakespeare's works are informed by other writers, and he in turn is among literature's most influential authors. A greater understanding of Shakespeare is a valuable resource, not only for a better understanding of the works of Shakespeare himself, but also for enhancing our acquaintance with the literature of other ages, from classical to postmodern.

The Life of Timon of Athens however, is not among Shakespeare's more popular plays, nor is it highly performed. In the words of Jonathan Bate, who wrote the Royal Shakespeare Company edition's introduction to the play: "[...This] will always remain one of Shakespeare's least known, least loved and least performed plays. Its exposure of our enslavement to money is too close to the bone. Why would large numbers of people who have the financial comfort that allows them to benefit from the public art form of theatre want to spend an evening being beaten up on the subject?" (Bate *William Shakespeare Complete Works* 1746)

In addition to the matter of this play's relative obscurity – it is not nearly as central in the public discussion, media presentation, etc. of Shakespeare's cannon as many of his other dramas, such as *The Merchant of Venice* or *Romeo and Juliet* – the above quote of Bate brings up an important platitude frequently found in the written discourse surrounding the play. A common critical stance with regard to *Timon of Athens* is that it is primarily an economic play. This is readily observed in much of the criticism and editorial commentary found in prominent editions of *Timon*, which privilege economically focused themes, providing relatively few alternatives in their thematic

discourse. The critical and editorial commentary which accompanies prominent editions of *Timon* is arguably the most influential body of extended written critical analysis on the play, because the prominent editions of the work, so widely available, provide the primary “interface” between the public who read the play and the work itself (including those who read it in academia, where such editions are often used). This may perhaps be said about any of Shakespeare's works. Therefore, the analysis of the play in relation to this body of commentary pertaining to it has merit. While this thesis will not limit itself to the discourse of such editorial context alone, such discourse is of value in revealing commonly held views on the play.

Regarding *Timon's* themes, the Cambridge edition says that *Timon* gives special emphasis to wealth (Klein, critical commentary in: Shakespeare, William. *The Life of Timon of Athens* 5); the Oxford edition's lengthy economic exegesis on the play likens Timon to Mammon (Jowett, critical commentary in: Shakespeare, William. *The Life of Timon of Athens* 67); the Arden edition says that *Timon* is first and foremost about money (Dawson, Minton, critical commentary in: Shakespeare, William. *The Life of Timon of Athens* 3), and the Royal Shakespeare Company edition says that the desire for money is the heart of the matter in the play (Bate 1744). This can be seen in the action on stage. Or can it? Of the four principle characters in *Timon*, none show a great desire to accumulate wealth for any prolonged period.

After finding gold, Timon wants to give it away, as he did before, though for opposing reasons. Timon's arguments as to the conflicts associated with gold are a mere extension of his generally antipathetic philosophy after his fall, and are insufficient to justify his extremism. In the wilderness, when Timon shows Apemantus that he has gold, Apemantus scarcely reacts, though it completely contradicts his assertion that Timon would be a courtier if he had the means. Obviously money isn't at the heart of the matter for Apemantus, for he has other matters on his heart. Flavius and Alcibiades accept Timon's gold only as an unsolicited gift, otherwise they do little in the pursuit of personal wealth. And the Senators banish Alcibiades for purely non-financial reasons.

For a play about money, the main characters all show a relative ambivalence about it,

once Timon becomes insolvent and a set of conflict-dynamics in the drama are established between Timon and the flatterers. Thus, in analyzing *Timon* in terms of characterization, and the motivations of the work's primary figures, we are presented with a relatively hollow core to support the thematic centrality of economics. The characters most interested in acquiring wealth are a peripheral collection of whores, servants, and flatterers, many of whom are not even given names.

The characterization – as revealed through dialog and the action upon the stage – does not emphasize economic themes to the extent which one might normally anticipate from an economic work, given the emphasis of such themes in prevalent critical analyses. It is therefore a logical course of action to take a closer look at where one finds structural details and/or themes which show to be valid, or challenge, the *degree* to which Timon is justifiably classed as an economic work. Please note at the outset that the word “degree” is emphasized here, and central economic elements in *Timon* are in no way denied.

Imagery is often thematically important in providing indirect commentary on a work's depiction, in such a way as to emphasize or reveal themes. This indirect function matches the poetic ideals espoused by Cleanth Brooks, for example in *The Well Wrought Urn* (Brooks *The Well Wrought Urn* 9) and his essay “Irony as a Principle of Structure”. (Brooks “Irony as a Principle of Structure”. 1) Perhaps it is in this facet of the drama's structure where one might find a significant link to economic themes, counterbalancing the aforementioned difficulties with characterization; or perhaps it is here one may find alternative perspectives on *Timon*.

Timon's imagery presents a well-orchestrated “symphony” which resonates with the play's action and themes. Much of the critical discourse in prominent editions of *Timon* omits highly detailed analysis its structure, and lacks any substantial delineation as to the play's elemental or cosmic patterns; this despite the fact that Frank Kermode describes the work as “schematic to an unusual degree” (Kermode, critical commentary in: Shakespeare, William. *The Life of Timon of Athens* 1442), implying a central thematic role for structure in the work, and despite the abundance of cosmic imagery in

the drama. When this area of literary analysis is touched upon in the editorial comments accompanying prominent editions of *Timon*, much of the discussion focuses upon details of the work aligned with some of the play's source material – Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and the Gold, Silver, Bronze and Iron Ages of classical tradition – in ways which tend to support the economic perspectives which these editorial commentaries privilege; and yet *Timon's* elemental imagery, that of earth, air, fire and water (which may also be aligned with *Metamorphoses*) is not given exposition, nor is it included in comparisons with classical works, in such discussion of the play's background. This aspect of critical commentary on *Timon* contrasts markedly with plays such as *Richard II* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, celebrated for their patterns of elemental imagery.

For example, the 145 page introduction to the Arden edition gives no substantial analysis of elemental/celestial imagery; nor does the Cambridge edition's 66 page introduction to the play; and the Oxford edition's 164 page introduction contains only a small amount of cosmic analysis of the play, this being primarily focused upon the aforementioned classical traditions of Ovid and the various ages (Gold, Silver, etc.), together with the Bible. However, in contrast with structure and imagery, economic factors are routinely explored at length in most of the prominent editions of *Timon*, and little importance placed upon thematic factors which might vie with economic ones, or at least add greater depth and contrast to *Timon's* analysis and presentation.

This thesis explores the themes of *The Life of Timon of Athens*, and asks the following thesis question: In what ways are the centrality of economic themes supported, or challenged, by this play, its imagery, and its historical context? In seeking to answer this question, the play's structure, imagery, characterization, and historical context will be explored.

Thesis Outline

The first three chapters of this thesis will focus primarily upon relevant Jacobean paradigms and facets of the play, especially those which tend to support economic readings of *Timon*. The fourth chapter will focus primarily upon alternative readings.

Introduction: General concepts, planning and methodology for the thesis are given here, as well as statements concerning the stance of this thesis toward some prominent issues in regard to the play.

Chapter 1: The question of whether Timon falls as a tragic character, and prominent viewpoints of Renaissance England will be treated, to give a historical and cultural perspective, in order to focus upon issues of relevance to thematic interpretation.

Chapter 2: Timon's imagery, particularly its elemental and cosmic imagery, will be analyzed in detail.

Chapter 3: This chapter treats relevant Jacobean economic issues which have resonance in *Timon*. This will include the relationship with points of imagery covered in the previous chapter.

Chapter 4: Aspects of *Timon* other than the plays' economic features, or having the potential to function outside the economic discourse to an appreciable degree, will be presented and analyzed. Conclusion: Concluding comments on the findings of this investigation will be given.

The Co-authorship Issue

It is believed by many – but not all – scholars that the play was co-authored by Thomas Middleton (the 2008 Arden and 2004 Oxford editions even giving Middleton the honor of authorship alongside Shakespeare on the title page). Co-authorship of this play is unproven, yet the consensus about it is strong enough to not ignore. This, more or less, is the conclusion of A. D. Nuttall, in his cogent analysis of the co-authorship claim. (Nuttall 39) Regarding the fact that in the Folio the name of the character Ventidius is spelled in different ways, seeming to indicate different authors, Nuttall points out the Shakespeare even spelled his own name in more than one way. (Nuttall *Harvester New Critical Introductions to Shakespeare: Timon of Athens* 31) If he spelled his name in

various ways, why should he not spell a character's name in various ways as well? Furthermore, when evaluating authorship based upon spelling variations, one may also take into account the freedom of printers to alter spelling in Renaissance England. As it may be commonly observed that many people readily imitate other people's manner of speech and writing, it would not be surprising if professional writers, like Shakespeare, also do the same, perhaps with precise and expert skill in the imitation. In fact Shakespeare is known for his openness to the influence of other writers in the creation of his works, and for how readily he draws from various literary sources. Many of the constituents of *Timon* itself are drawn from previously published works, including earlier versions of the Timon story. It is plausible that he could have been influenced by Middleton's style, using or imitating it for this work in the absence of any collaboration. The assigning of co-authorship to *Timon*, however adured in prominent commentary on the play, is far from unanimous. The editor of the Cambridge edition of the play, Karl Klein is skeptical Middleton's collaboration. (Klein 61 – 65) Frank Kermode's writes that *Timon* is a “wholly Shakespearean play” (Kermode, 1441), an assertion most difficult to confute, and, as stated, Nuttall does not concur that Middleton's co-authorship is factual. (Nuttall 39) In the absence of a co-author being given in the early publication of a particular Shakespearean work, the methodology of this thesis hesitates to assume any such collaboration. Iterative literary patterns will be primarily focused upon Shakespeare's cannon together with historical-biographical context; however such context may include Middleton's possible influences upon Shakespeare (as opposed to direct collaboration in the writing of *Timon*), as well as references to Middleton which show facets of the historical period and milieu shared by the two authors.

Methodology

This thesis will investigate the play *The Life of Timon of Athens*, including six prominent editions of the work, and the critical commentary which accompanies these editions, together with a selection of relevant written works, putting into perspective qualities and features of the play.

This analytical discourse will explore *Timon* through the prism of its poetics and

imagery. The input and output of this prism will itself be linked to the historical paradigms of Renaissance England. The approach of this thesis strives to yield a perspective on the play less colored by succeeding ages or revisionist priorities, and to emphasize plausible thematic associations of the play as a Jacobean work.

The literary discourse and analysis of this thesis will include a historical-biographical approach, primarily combined with varying degrees of applied criticism and New Criticism. “Applied criticism” is here defined: “applied criticism [...] concerns itself with particular works and writers; in an applied critique, the theoretical principles controlling the analysis. Interpretation and evaluation are often left implicit, or brought in only as the occasion demands. Among the more influential works of applied criticism in England [...] are the literary essays of [...] Dryden, Dr. Johnson, Coleridge, Hazlitt and Virginia Woolf].” (Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms* 62) New Criticism is a movement, largely predominant in Anglo-American literary analysis of the forties until around the late sixties, in which the text of a work is strongly focused upon and analyzed in detail. It has been said that New Criticism was a reaction against the historical-biographical approach which preceded it, and that New Critics privilege the text of a work at the expense of its context. While they differ from their historical biographical predecessors in methodology, New Critics' exclusion of context has at times been exaggerated, and such context may found in New Criticism, especially if it is relevant to the particular text being analyzed. “The New Critics differed from one another in many ways [...] but many of them shared the point of view that a proper procedure for literary analysis included] close reading [...] which is] the detailed analysis of the interrelationships and [...] ambiguities (“ambiguities” in this context means “multiple meanings”)] of the [...] components within a work.” (Abrams 216) The historical-biographical approach used in this thesis will seek to explore how *Timon* may have been influenced by, and functioned in, the social and historical context in which the play was produced. The historical references used will cover a range of subjects, including religion, philosophy, art, economics, and politics. A. D. Nuttall's book on *Timon* will also be used.

In combination with the above approaches, aspects of Plato's philosophy, and ways in

which *Timon* may relate to these, will be discussed.

While this thesis does not make claims of incontrovertible assertions of fact, one may reasonably, in such an analysis, at least look for and discuss plausible resonances and consonances, and how they may relate to the literary themes of the work in question. Such relationships, and potential associations between the literary work in question and its surrounding culture and history, are often useful, and may be aimed at the production of reasonable literary analysis. Such a course of action is intended for this thesis.

Conventions of this Thesis

Various editions of Shakespearean works may differ in how they number the lines of Shakespeare's plays and poetry. When exact lines of Shakespearean works are referred to in this thesis, they will primarily be those used in the Royal Shakespeare Company's edition, *William Shakespeare Complete Works*, listed in the bibliography.

The symbol / is used to show where an old line of text ends and a new one begins. Act, scene and line numbers of plays will be indicated by numbers separated by a period (in British English, a full stop), with act first, which is then followed by scene, and then by line number. These will usually be enclosed in parentheses.

Information concerning quotes, and other references to written sources, which are used in this thesis, are normally given in parentheses. The name of the writer is given, as well as the number of the page which contains the information in the original book, play, etc., usually following the writer's name.

For ease of reading and greater understanding, a number of words will be accompanied by definitions. Also, the spelling of Renaissance English words which differ from contemporary spellings will often be modernized.

Chapter One

Paradigms of Renaissance England

The *Timon* Tragedy

Does Timon Actually Fall From a High Position?

The traditional concept of a tragedy is a story in which a powerful figure falls from earthly prosperity, yet rises in other ways to greatness. (Bate 830) *Timon* is classed as a tragedy, but does the protagonist actually function as a tragic character? In the basic elemental pattern of the drama, we see a “commentary” of images from the cosmic environment that traces Timon's decline in relation to his loss of wealth. Before proceeding directly with this elemental system of motifs, Timon's actual status, high or low, at the outset will be dealt with. For if he falls, he should logically start higher at the opening than later in the play. In doing this it is worthwhile to address certain paradigms of early modern England, as well as the classical traditions from which a number of these paradigms are derived, which may be taken into account in evaluating Timon's state, high or low.

Timon of Athens opens with the Poet and Painter, Timon's image-makers, through conversation constructing a public likeness of their patron for the audience, much as they do professionally in their art. Before long Apemantus threatens to topple this lofty construction of Timon. The Poet and Painter eventually prove odious, but, it might well be argued, so does Apemantus, who provides the audience with the opposing evaluation; so what are we to make of Timon's initial economic largess?

Despite the fact that *Timon* is set in ancient Greece, classical Roman values arguably provide a better “literary lens” for judging the image and characterization of the

protagonist, because of the period in which *Timon* was written. “Early modern England understood its political and social arrangements primarily in historical terms: above all, in terms of the history of medieval England and of ancient Rome.” (Kewes “Contemporary Europe in Elizabethan and Early Stuart Drama” 153) To such a social paradigm one should add the more forward-looking aspects of Renaissance England, including what Archer describes as “humanist and Protestant discourses stressing moderation, sobriety and self-restraint”. (Archer “Shakespeare's London”, 50, 51) It is therefore a worthwhile endeavor to investigate such classical Roman influence in the work, as well as the other relevant social models prevalent in early modern England.

Additionally, the anachronism seen in Shakespeare's plays (for example clocks being referred to long before they were historically invented and Cleopatra playing billiards), shows a laxity of historical precision on the part of Shakespeare (Hattaway, “The Shakespearean History Play” 12), in which a blending ancient Greek and Roman features in the setting of a play could easily take place. A prominent example of the influence of Rome on England is James I's association of himself with Augustus; and “[... n]o less a poet than Ben Jonson prophesied that the lasting glory of James would parallel that of 'Augustus' state.’” (Miola, “Reading the Classics” 207 – 208)

A mark of Roman influence, affecting the mimesis in this play about ancient Greece, is its inclusion of gods from the Roman pantheon, rather than strictly adhering to Greek deities. For example Alcibiades invokes Neptune rather than Poseidon at the culmination of the play, and the Roman god Cupid makes an appearance, rather than the Greek Eros. Another sign of the Roman influence in *Timon* is the quote of the Latin author Horace, which is cited in Latin at 1.2.30. The fact that Shakespeare has an ancient Greek character in Athens depart from English, the principle language of the play, in order to speak Latin (rather than Greek), is unusual verisimilitude to say the least; and it seems to indicate a lack of concern for painstakingly recreating an ancient Greek setting in the play, opting instead for general classical allusion.

With regard to possible Roman influence upon Timon's characterization and role as a magnate, it was a well-defined obligation of the rich in ancient Rome to engage in

economically generous philanthropy. “They were expected to [...] perform the duties of patron (which included handing out cash)”. (Nagle 181) An example of such largess is displayed in the career of Pliny the Elder (A.D. 23 – 79), who, while he was a provincial governor in Bithynia (a region in northwestern Turkey) “tended to err on the side of caution, [... often] sending cases to the emperor which a more resolute (or perhaps unscrupulous) governor might have settled on the spot [...]” (Nagle *The Roman World: Sources and Interpretation* 177) Erring on the side of caution contrasts sharply with Timon's lack of self-restraint. Nonetheless, Pliny's history of caution did not prevent him from being a noted donator. He gave 500,000 sesterces for the support of the boys and girls of the urban plebs; he also gave a library and 100,000 sesterces for its upkeep. (Nagle 181) (“sesterce” : “a silver coin of ancient Rome”) (Kipfer, *Random House Webster's College Dictionary* 1122) (“plebs” : “the common people of ancient Rome”) (Thorndike, Barnhart *Thorndike Barnhart Student Dictionary* 849) Since a sesterce was apparently worth 2 ½ asses at some point in time (Kipfer 1122), Pliny's contributions appear to have been substantial. The example which Pliny provides us with, of fulfilling ancient Roman philanthropic social obligations, tends to support the image of a great Lord, put forward by the Poet and Painter at the outset.

The word “philanthropy”, is derived from Greek, and it is interesting that one of its definitions (in addition to the meaning of “giving money to help people who are poor or who need money to do useful things”), is “love of mankind generally.” (Treffry *Collins English Dictionary* 612) This definition is opposed to “misanthropy”, which describes Timon after his fall, much as Hibbard has observed. (Hibbard, critical commentary in: Shakespeare, William. *The Life of Timon of Athens* 10)

In addition to performing the duties of patron, the rich of ancient Rome were expected to serve in the legions. (Nagle 181) This role for Timon, which also aligns with the Roman ideal in his characterization, is strongly hinted at when Alcibiades says “I have heard and grieved / How cursed Athens, mindless of thy worth, / Forgetting thy great deeds, when neighbor states, / But for thy sword and fortune trod upon them [...]”. (4.3.97 – 100)

Though Timon naively attempts to purchase admiration from flatterers, he at least portrays a magnate's role which might well have been appreciated in Renaissance England, as he fulfills these classical roles for a magnate.

Although the classical tradition of lavish generosity, and possibly military service, is portrayed in Timon, the ancient Romans also had a history of dealing severely with those who failed to repay financial debts, potentially undermining the above glorification of Timon as patron from a classical perspective. For example, according to Rome's first law code (known as the Twelve Tables), after a debt was acknowledged or after a judgment was made in court, thirty days' grace were allowed for payment to be made, after which the debtor could be arrested and brought to court. If the debtor failed to satisfy the demand, and no one offered to provide a guarantee on his behalf, the creditor could take the debtor with him, and could bind him in fetters or in the stocks. In the absence of a settlement, the creditor was to be held for sixty days, and then produced before the court. After about 24 more days, the debtor would be executed or sold into slavery, and his property was divided up. (Nagle 84 – 86) To the degree that these economic features of ancient Roman history were known of in Jacobean England, they might potentially complicate the protagonist's stature and how he functions as a character, because though he is an ideal of Roman aristocracy as a patron, as a debtor he is offensive.

Simultaneously, one may argue that the representation of debt in the play, whether related to classical history or not, is at times lampooned in the work – Timon's debt is sometimes depicted as a comic event, for example the scene in which his creditors are portrayed like clowns in disarray after Timon's "last supper" of stones and water. If money is presented in the play as detrimental, it is certainly not because of any dunning or heavy ruthlessness on the part of Timon's creditors.

Regardless of the possibility of Roman influences on the work, and regardless of the interplay between Timon as patron and as negligent debtor, the glorification of the protagonist as a paragon of generosity is strongly established at the outset. The same can be said, in the opening phases, in relation to what Archer describes as "humanist

and Protestant discourses stressing moderation”, because, Timon's image is not tarnished to any great extent in the play's opening, despite his unbalanced approach to his circumstances which violates such humanist and Protestant ideals. So great is Timon's philanthropic appeal, that even Apemantus's carping cannot fully diminish his stature in the early phases of the play – though Apemantus does manage to deflate the status of much of Timon's entourage, who frequently serve as straight-men to his jokes. The punches in Apemantus's verbal attacks, together with humanist and Protestant ideology, do not fully land upon the protagonist until later in the play, and are rather poetic “pre-echoes”, setting up Timon's fall in subsequent sections of the work, and only then seriously tarnishing him.

Thus Timon appears at first blush to be a worthy, if careless, example of a venerated philanthropic tradition, possessing at least some of the features of a tragic character who commences in a lofty position prior to his subsequent decline. If we assert that he is not a high character who falls, then we should look elsewhere for signs of this, for example if his fall is so extreme or monstrous later in the play that it causes us to question his actual magnanimity, even before the fall, and to undo his previous characterization; or if other dramatic patterns show that Timon's original stature was deceptive. There are indeed arguments which support these notions which will be discussed in the following chapters.

Timon May be a Comedy, Not a Tragedy

If Timon is not a tragedy, then he may not follow the pattern of a tragic character. “The dominant tradition, associated with Lucian, found Timon ridiculous, a figure to be mocked for his excessive misanthropy.” There are a number of examples of Renaissance works connected with Timon which “suggest that Timon did not come down to the Renaissance as a tragic character, but instead as one to be laughed at or observed with curiosity.” (Dawson, Minton 19) Is Shakespeare's Timon actually absurd and ludicrous?

One indication that Timon is a comedy is the apparent spoof on Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*. The two prostitutes who accompany Alcibiades correspond to the

two Amazons who accompany the military leader and ruler of Athens in *The Knight's Tale*, one of the stories in the *Canterbury Tales* collection. (Chaucer *The Canterbury Tales* 26)

If Shakespeare's *Timon* was intended to be viewed with curiosity, perhaps it might have been part of a tradition from folklore. In *Timon's* classical sources, he does not reside in the wilderness (though Lucian's *Timon* is placed in a rural setting, as he becomes a farm laborer), but “only in Shakespeare does he wish to live in the forest [...]. In this part of *Timon's* story Shakespeare is parting company with the classical sources to draw on the [...] wild man in the forest [...] tradition [...] of popular culture [...]” (Gillespie, Rhodes *Shakespeare and Elizabethan Popular Culture* 14, 15)

It is possible that *Timon* is more vignette-based than certain other Shakespearean plays, and this style may be linked to comic properties in *Timon*. “The last five years of the sixteenth century [... witnessed] the emergence of a new style of playwriting.” Among satiric playwrights, there was shift away from a strong narrative basis and in the direction of a series of loosely organized vignettes where the follies of social types and languages were displayed, including satirical ranting, and this influenced *Troilus and Cressida*. (Yachnin “Shakespeare's Problem Plays and the Drama of His Time: *Troilus and Cressida*, *All's Well That Ends Well*, *Measure for Measure*” 54) This theatrical phenomenon is linked to Jonson's humor plays, *Every Man In His Humour* and *Every Man Out of His Humour*, something which may also be relevant to *Timon's* elemental imagery, as much of the play's significant elemental imagery is in the form of humors or related images. It is plausible that *Timon* also has the influence of a vignette-like structure, to some degree, and it certainly contains ranting; especially in some of the scenes in which Timon appears in the wilderness. To those expecting a strong, intense and intricate plot, and series of suspenseful narrative events, *Timon* might appear as if it were less polished and complete than some of Shakespeare's other works, when in fact this might be the result of the looser dramatic arrangement which one might expect from the influence of more vignette-based theater. In relation to the discussion of whether Timon is actually a tragic figure who falls, the influences of such theater mentioned above by Yachnin would tend to negate this aspect of characterization in

Timon, and indicate he is the protagonist of a comedy.

The play's imagery, action and characterization, as well as the comic tradition of its sources, indicate that Timon has blended characteristics of a tragic character, villain, and fool, mingled in his characterization, to such an extent that the play is probably not entirely a tragedy, but an example of mixed-genre.

Chapter Two

An Analysis of Imagery and Elemental Depiction

Elemental Imagery

2011 marks the 350th anniversary of the publication of Robert Boyle's "The Skeptical Chemist", widely recognized as marking the birth of modern chemistry. Boyle questioned the conventional view of chemistry at the time, which was that matter consisted of earth, air, fire and water. In Shakespeare's age, it was believed that matter consisted of the four elements of earth, air, fire and water. This belief was based upon the ancient Greek Empedocles' explanation of matter, which was later adopted by Aristotle. (Gillie *Longman Companion to English Literature* 496, 500). This chapter will explore elemental imagery, including how it relates to Timon's economic fall.

"The [...] four elements [...] are the ancient Greek and medieval conception of the basic components of matter; they are air, fire, earth and water. It was a division made by Empedocles of Sicily and adopted by Aristotle. Aristotle [...] considered matter in regard to the [...] qualities that he believed all [...] matter] to possess; these [...] were hotness, coldness, wetness, and dryness.] His four elements contained these properties in different combinations: air = hot and wet; fire = hot and dry; earth = cold and dry; water = cold and wet. These [...] were the basic constituents of nature. Aristotle's great prestige in the Middle Ages caused his theory to dominate the thought [regarding matter] of the time. The medieval alchemists, forbears of the modern [...] chemist, noticed that the properties of various kinds of matter change, [...] for example] iron becomes rust, and they deduced from Aristotle's theory that materials could be changed, provided that they retained the same basic properties, [...] for example] lead could be changed into gold. The theory dominated European thought until [...] the seventeenth century], when the English [...] chemist Robert Boyle (1627 – 91) taught [...] more modern chemistry]. The theory of the [...] four elements [...] was connected in classical and medieval times with the medical [...] theory of the [...] humours [...], or four basic liquid constituents of the body. The blood humour " [...] is hot and wet, and] is linked to air; choler [is hot and dry, and] is associated with fire; phlegm [is cold and wet, and] corresponds to water [...] ;] and melancholy [...] is cold and dry, and corresponds] to earth. The preponderance of one or [...] another] of these humours [...] was supposed to determine the temperament. (Gillie 496)

The four elements feature prominently in the works of Shakespeare, and it is reasonable to surmise that Shakespeare's elemental imagery was far less figurative than it is for a contemporary audience, as it was linked to the state of scientific thinking during the Renaissance. As stated in the quote above, it was after Shakespeare died that the English chemist Robert Boyle (1627 – 91) taught a new theory about elements, replacing the ancient Greek system of earth, air, fire and water. Therefore, in Europe in the early 1600s, elemental imagery was, in addition to being an esthetic and narrative device, the generally accepted explanation of much earthly phenomena and a way of looking at physical reality, both within and outside of the world of artistic depiction. Since elemental thinking was an ingrained part of European thought and literary conventions, it should come as no great surprise to see elemental imagery functioning actively in Shakespearean pieces, with or without frequent repetition of such images. There is thus a very sound basis for analyzing and interpreting literary imagery of the early 1600s in terms of the four elements, and other depictions of the cosmos, linked to the state of scientific and popular thinking at the time.

Many of Shakespeare's images have strong associations with one or more of these four elements. In the words of Victor Shklovsky “Art is thinking in images.” (Sklovsky “Art as Technique” 16) It may be said that art is also more than that, but images are a principal aspect of much art, and imagery is especially important in Shakespeare's works. “In Shakespeare's tragedies images function as a rhetorical means of placing emphasis. As W. H. Clemen says: 'In Shakespeare's great tragedies we can observe time and again how the imagery takes its cue from some real event taking place on the stage, this event then being symbolically interpreted by the imagery.' We can collect and read images so that a motif or theme can be made apparent.” (Klein 26) By paying close attention to how Shakespeare styled *Timon*, including the play's elemental depiction, patterns emerge by which one may be directed to themes.

Gold's Elemental Associations

“The word 'gold' occurs far more often in *Timon of Athens* than in any other [... Shakespearean] play.” (Jowett 55) Gold, and the related practice of alchemy, suggest a connection to elemental depiction in *Timon*. Alchemy is directly referred to in the play, and alchemists concerned themselves with the four elements. To an early modern audience, gold, as matter, would probably have consisted of a combination of the basic elements, and this could be represented in the play's mimesis. There are broad literary and cultural traditions which relate gold to the elements of both earth and fire.

Gold has archetypal fire associations. “[Pindar likens gold to fire stating] ‘Gold, like fire blazing / in the night [...]’.” In Sonnet 18 Shakespeare has the sun’s gold complexion (Ferber *A Dictionary of Literary Symbols* 87), and the sun represents the element of fire in *Richard II* (Gurr, critical commentary in: Shakespeare, William. *Richard II* 23 – 4), showing a link, between fire, and both the sun and gold. Gold has a relationship to the sun, also a fire icon. Eos, the ancient Greek goddess of the dawn, has a golden throne. “The sun is golden – Pindar [...] has ‘the golden strength of the sun [...]’.” According to ancient belief, gold comes from the fire of the sun [...].” (Ferber 87) Likely sources for Shakespeare's *Timon* also link gold to fire. In Lucian's dialogue, Timon says of gold that it “[...] glitterest as gloriously night and day as the clear flaming fire [...]” (Lucian, Dawson, Minton 349) In the anonymous play *Timon*, a character says of gold that it shines like fire. (Anonymous, Dawson, Minton 396)

Gold's relationship to the element of earth is evident from its source, stone and earth. There is also a classical relationship between gold and earth, in the form of the underworld. “The telling confusion between Plutus, god of gold, and Pluto, lord of the underworld, is [...]found in Shakespeare and other early modern writers (in *Troilus and Cressida* Ulysses refers to 'every grain of Pluto's gold'). It is perhaps a characteristic mark of western civilization to conflate the precious metal with hell on account of gold's power to corrupt and its origin in the earth.” (Jowett 54)

There is also a relationship in classical tradition between wealth, as well as gold, and the underworld. Plutus, the wealthy Greek god of gold, is also an underworld deity. (Bate 1755) Like Plutus, Pluto is also associated with both wealth and the underworld. In

relation to ancient Roman mythology “Pluto, etymologically 'the one who brings wealth', was assimilated to the Greek Hades. But like all subterranean divinities, those that nourish the earth and help plants to open, Pluto was assimilated to the god Dis Pater, the father of [... wealth].” (Schmidt *Roman Mythology* 84) “Dis” means “the ruler of the underworld (in ancient Roman belief)”. In Latin, “pater” means “father”. Thus, though it is Plutus who more directly presides over gold, both he and Pluto are gods of wealth, as well as being underworld deities, with a connection to earth. The Second Lord labels Timon as exceeding even Plutus, the god of gold (1.1.295 – 6), thereby associates Timon with both gold and the underworld. The linking of gold with the underworld is firmly in the classical tradition. An example of further connection with the Christian tradition of hell in the underworld, linked to both earth and fire, is found in Shakespeare's depiction of elemental imagery in *Richard II*. (5.5.108)

The earth-fire amalgamation of gold functions significantly in the poetics of the play, as will be further delineated. The elemental compound of earth and fire – common to both flint and gold – is introduced as a poetic pre-echo at the opening when the Poet speaks of the fire in the flint. (1.1.31).

Timon's Elemental Imagery in Relation to Richard II

Richard II is celebrated for its elemental imagery, and it is fitting to take a brief look at this play for recognition of prominent patterns of elemental imagery, in relation to *Timon*. Both plays are, to a large extent, arranged around a highly systematic configuration of elemental motifs. This is not to say that there is a special relationship between *Timon* and *Richard II*, and one should not automatically extend all aspects of *Richard II's* system of iconographic interpretation to *Timon*. In fact these two plays contrast strongly. But it is their very contrast which makes them, as foils for each other, interesting in terms of their very different elemental patterns; this being said, the two plays also overlap in their systems of depiction of elemental imagery. In a manner comparable to Richard, Timon invokes the elements of earth and water in describing his tomb (4.3.378 – 382), and his departing solar fire, with “Sun. hide thy beams”. (5.1.223

In the introduction to the Cambridge edition of *Richard the Second*, Andrew Gurr states “Most of the images of the play are organised in relation to the four elements: earth, air, fire and water. Richard, the sun-king of fire, contends with Bullingbrook, the flood. [...] Fire and water struggle for the earth of England and conduct their fight with the airy breath of words. [...] The basic images of the elements appear in different forms, some perhaps less recognisable than others.” (Gurr 23 – 4) Gurr's criteria for judging imagery as elemental include: fire associated with the sun (for example Richard's sun emblem, and Bullingbrook's fair day at 3.2.218; storms, in accordance with fire and water being in conflict with each other in the air; references to humors such as blood and choler; air appearing as breath, tongues, the voice and words, sometimes associated with the separation of tongues and hearts; the misuse of air by the tongues of men, for example when language suppresses reality; tongues which find things sweet or sour as Fortune changes the earth for them; air as bird images; earth as the heavy element, with venomous snakes, toads and spiders, as well as the sweet products of fertility; earth images include low altitude and closeness to earth, including Richard's grave; the earth, as England, is a teeming womb at 2.1.51 (similar to Timon's description of earth at 4.3.188 – 190). Earth-air imagery includes the traditions of kneeling and doffing hats. Bullingbrook's flood when he invades England from the sea, and Richard's tears, are water icons (Gurr 24 – 31).

Of the references above, those found significantly in *Timon*, include: humors such as blood and choler; air appearing as breath, tongues, the voice and words, sometimes associated with the separation of tongues and hearts; the abuse of air by the tongues of men, for example when language suppresses reality; earth as the heavy element, with venomous animals; and low altitude closeness to earth, including the grave image of Timon's tomb.

In giving away his wealth, Timon spreads gold, much as King Richard the sun-king radiates light (for example when he associates himself with day). Gold, being mixed

with earth, is impure, a baser fire icon than Richard's sun. When Timon runs out of wealth, instead of gold he gives the earth element (of stone), together with the element of water, as at his "last supper" with the flatterers. The earth-water image of Timon's "last supper" provides a poetic "pre-echo" of his stone tomb in the water of the sea; the former marking the conclusion of the section of the play in Athens, the latter marking the conclusion of the section in the wilderness. Timon again acquires gold in the wilderness, returns to giving it away, then once again gives earth as stones, which he throws at the Poet and Painter, nearing the conclusion of the second section (in the wilderness). At the end of the play, Timon has built a stone tomb at the edge of the sea, an expression of earth and water. His increasing closeness to earth, as the play progresses, resembles that of *Richard II*, and Timon might be said to outdo Richard's decline to earth and the water epitomized by Timon's cave-dwelling and tomb.

The Element of Air

The element of air is largely found in *Timon* as the breath of words and height of social position or fortune. Fortune herself is given the air-giving altitude of a high and pleasant hill, and Fortune wafts (here "wafts" means "beckons", but seems to have air associations as well) someone with Lord Timon's appearance to her. (1.1.74 –81) As in *Richard II*, the air icon of the breath of words is iterative in *Timon*, for example one of the Senators tells Alcibiades, with regard to his plea, "You breathe in vain." (3.6.58) Air as a symbol of social height or fortune is displayed through bird images. One of Timon's creditors says "I do fear / When every feather sticks in his own wing, / Lord Timon will be left a naked gull, / Which flashes now a phoenix." (2.1.29 –32) Later, the Second Servant calls Timon "A dedicated beggar to the air" (4.2.13) and the Third Servant speaks of a "sea of air". (4.2.24)

At the opening, Timon is described as "breathed" (1.1.10), in other words, other people do Timon's breathing, or speaking for him, and he derives power from the words of others; but as he falls from power, he exclaims "Give me breath" (2.2.40), and "They have ev'n put my breath from me." (3.5.1) Flavius says that when the means are gone

which buy praise, the breath of praise is gone. (2.2.173 –4) The air of words breathed by his flatterers fail to match their deeds, their praise giving Timon altitude of air at the outset is merely insincere flattery; and the wealth which attracts this flattery is merely debt, debt which one might also connect to empty words, since Timon fails to repay what he owes. The words of Flavius's warnings have been thwarted by the protagonist's failure to listen. (2.2.125). Timon's high position of air is denied him poetically when Apemantus says he will to lock Timon's heavens from him. (2.1.237)

While in *Richard II* the air of political power is transformed to words of poetry, enabling Richard to rise as he falls, in *Timon* the air icon is another thing altogether. The stage is crowded with odious characters and frequent use of unattractive language (in the form of flattery, insults, conflict, and puns on sexual disease), often matched by negative air images. These include: reeking villainy (4.1.72), “Breath infect breath” (4.1.30), diseased perfumes (4.3.198), smoke (4.3.149 – 151) (which, like perfume, can conceal reality), rotten humidity (4.3.2), “infect the air” (4.3.3), and storms (4.3.280 – 282). Timon's flatterers are called “vapours” (4.1.76), Flavius goes away in a cloud (3.4.48), and “arrogant man [...] is puffed”. (4.3.191) “Puffed” means “inflated (with pride)”. (Bate 1785)

Earth

“Whom this beneath world doth embrace” (1.1.53) appears to express Timon's command of the air element, and distance from earth, through social and economic height. But the point is stated ambiguously – Timon might not actually be above the beneath world, he is merely embraced by it. Earth is the source of gold, and Timon's speech undermines this element as a source of “rotten humidity”. (4.3.1, 2) His apostrophe to nature invokes creatures of the earth which are poisonous (or which were thought at the time to be poisonous), the toad, adder, newt and worm, much as Richard II does as he descends towards the element of earth with the loss of political power.

Fire and Water

To the ancient Greek writer Heraclitus, fire's ever-changing shapes suggested that it is the fundamental substance of the world. (Ferber 73) In relation to *Timon*, the most important manifestations of fire are its presence in gold and in the humor of choler. This fire image is opposed to the element of water, represented in the play by tears. Fire and its opposite water are the play's most important elements, in terms of both the protagonist's characterization, and the themes of the play.

“The original meaning [of 'humour'] was 'liquid'. Ancient Greek and Latin medicine passed on to the Middle Ages the theory of four liquids (humours) in the human body: phlegm, blood, yellow bile or choler, and black bile or melancholy. Individual temperaments derived their quality from the predominance of one or other [...] humor [...]. In [the] later 16th C [... ‘humour’ as a word] was a man's characteristic disposition, whether or not related to the original four physical humours. (Gillie 571)

The anonymous comedy *Timon*, a very likely source for Shakespeare's *Timon of Athens* (Dawson , Minton 359), includes fascinating similarities to Shakespeare's version in its elemental imagery, for example fire expressed in opposition to water, with the words “choleric revenge” soon following. (Anonymous, Dawson, Minton 379) “Choleric” usually has such meanings as “angry, or easily made angry, etc.”. “Choleric” also can mean “of choler”. (Ayto *Hutchinson Dictionary of Difficult Words* 72; Funk and Wagnalls *Standard Dictionary* 122).

Choler, also called yellow bile, is central to *Timon*, and is developed in the drama's poetics. It is also repeatedly rendered in the combative nature so frequently displayed in the action and dialog of the play: the constantly carping Apemantus, the wrath of the senators, war and Alcibiades' rebellion, and in the enraged protagonist. “*Timon* is said to have an angry mood.” (Jowett, 4) Choler's relation to anger, with its classical and medieval roots, was a well-established paradigm of Renaissance England. In Shakespeare's milieu, the heritage of the Middle Ages was still familiar and significant

(Salingar "The Elizabethan Literary Renaissance" 68); the humors were referred to in literature of Chaucer. In *The Canterbury Tales* he writes "The cause of every malady you'd got / He knew, and whether dry, cold, moist or hot" (Chaucer 14). Here Chaucer is referring to the four elements, which a man's body was conceived as being composed of, and the four humors were bodily fluids, composed of the four elements and associated with various moods. Fire's qualities are hotness and dryness. "A [... choleric man ...] was thought to be hot and dry." (Coghill, critical commentary in: Chaucer, Geoffrey. *The Canterbury Tales* 491)

Timon directly mentions choler (4.3.369); as well as humor (with its implied elemental components) in connection with anger. (1.2.28 – 29) The plays' frequent manifestations of anger, as well as of pride (for example at 1.1.215, and 4.3.293) are tied in classical traditions of burning. "In Greek and Latin literature one could [...] burn with anger or pride." (Ferber 75) As fire is hot and dry (Gillie 496, Coghill 491), it is not surprising that the protagonist wants earth to dry its fertile womb. (4.3.198, Bate 1785)

"Timon and Apemantus are closely related characters, and in either phase of the play they are clearly set off against each other." (Klein 21) The fire motif of choler is frequently implied by anger exuded by the protagonist and his nemesis Apemantus. Both men share a mutual abundance of yellow bile. Much the same may be said of Alcibiades and the senators when they lock horns early in the play. Timon tells Apemantus "Choler does kill me that thou art alive" (4.3.369), to which Apemantus, his tormentor, replies "Would thou wouldst burst!" (4.3.371). "An extreme excess of choler as one of the bodily [...] humours [...] was [...] thought capable of making the heart burst". (Jowett 292) A similar pattern of angry conflict and choler is also seen in *Richard II*. "Blood and choler [...] rule [...] the] early exchanges [of Richard II and Bullingbrook]." (Gurr24)

Additional fire images include: The Fool's joke about scalding a chicken, (2.2.75) This image can also function to show low height of the air element, much like when King Richard is described as having his feathers plucked. Such words as "scald" and "molten coin" at 3.1.40 –41; "Flamen" "Flamen" means "priest") and "scolds" resemble the

words “flame” and “scald”. (4.2.164 – 165). Timon's angry words change the air of pious breath into potentially concealing smoke when he request that the two prostitutes burn up the person whose pious breath tries to convert them, and to let their fire prevail over his smoke. (4.3.149 – 151) “Hyperion's quick'ning fire” is degraded by Timon in the context of his speech. (4.3.185) “Hyperion” means “the father of the sun, sometimes the sun god himself in Greek mythology”. “Quick'ning” (also “quickenning”) means “life-giving”

Timon's emotional inferno is depicted in the generally angry setting of a society at war. “Alcibiades is first of all a soldier, an angry one for most of the play.” (Dawson 61) The association of fire and war is found in classical literature, for example “[...]n the *Iliad* warriors are fiery.” (Ferber 75) The contrasting depiction, of Alcibiades' kind, merciful and forgiving qualities, occurs at the conclusion of the play, together with fire's opposing image of water.

At first it is Apemantus who is “ever angry” (1.2.31), and is described by Timon with an elemental description, foreshadowing Timon's own humor, “ye've got a humour there / Does not become a man” (1.2.28 – 29) “[In the] later 16th C [...] “humour” as a word] was a man's characteristic disposition, whether or not related to the original four physical humours [...] as used by] “Shakespeare and his contemporaries [...]” (Gillie 571). However in the context of the other elemental patterns in the play, as well as the continued paradigm of the four elements and their related humors at the time *Timon* was written, it is reasonable to attribute elemental attributes to the use of the word “humour” here. Even if the word “humour” could have non-elemental meanings in itself, the conventional beliefs of Renaissance England associating anger with choler and fire would likely have been active in the context of a Jacobean audience.

The humor imagery and depiction in *Timon* had important models and influences in the playwriting of the period, and these show iterative representation of humor-based portrayal. Ben Jonson in *Every Man in His Humour* (Act III Scene I) speaks of humour as “a monster”, and wrote that it was caused by such things as affectation, encouraged by fashionable ostentation, and not restrained by good sense. Jonson treats humour as a

monstrous distortion of human nature. Much like the milieu in *Timon*, “Jonson's world [in his humor plays] is a jungle of predators and victims [...]” (Gillie 571) While Jonson emphasizes greed more than is found in *Timon* the protagonist (though not the peripheral characters who prey upon him), the other mentioned qualities which Jonson connects with humors (in his comedy of humors) fit *Timon* well. *Timon's* structural alignment with more vignette-based theatrical production (where the follies of social types and languages were displayed, including satirical ranting), mentioned earlier, is interesting in relation to the elemental imagery involved, as the phenomenon of such theater is also linked to Jonson's humor plays, *Every Man In His Humour* and *Every Man Out of His Humour*. (Yachnin 54)

The descriptions “monster” and “monstrous”, above, can activate dehumanizing associations, which suit the characterization of *Timon*. Apemantus, as an exponent of anger and constant social attack, receives the label of being the opposite of humanity (1.1.292), a description which will later apply precisely to *Timon*. In *Timon's* characterization, choler consumes him and is out of control. In the action on stage this is triggered by the flatterers' betrayal, and through the air of words abused to conceal reality.

Timon's manifestation of choler in his characterization is unreasonable, unrestrained, and mainly indiscriminate. *Timon* aims it at humanity generally, with the temporary exception of Flavius, whose water element, tears, are able to break through the emotional armor of Misanthropos, and temporarily quell the flames within. Water extinguishes fire at the culmination of the play. While in *Richard II* heavenly fire is a righteous symbol, of divine political power, and Bullingbrook's water a threat to that sovereignty, in *Timon*, fire and water have, more or less, reversed functions and contextual relationships, in the development of the play's themes through imagery.

Fire's depiction in *Timon* as choler may also have associations with the punishment of hell, and the absence of fire may be associated with the lack of such a punishment. “The wrath of the Lord shall burn the wicked” says Isaiah [...]. From this it is but a step to the “hell fire” with which Jesus speaks of in relation to one who calls his brother a fool

(Matthew 5.22), the “lake of fire” which is the “second death” (Revelation 20.14 – 15) (Ferber 73) It is interesting in this context that Timon dies, not in a lake of fire, but in a sea of water, one which is associated, with Alcibiades' words of forgiveness.

Timon's financial fall occurs in the later phases of the first section of the play in Athens, and in this sections there is a contrasting depiction of fire images (such as when Timon's servant fails to get money from one of Timon's flatterers), and images of air and water (such as when Flavius and the other servants speak of Timon and say goodbye to each other). Up till this point it has primarily been up to Apemantus to supply most of the play's fiery attack, but this has been balanced with numerous images of water and air, the air often depicted negatively, matching the flatterers' deceiving air of words. The transitional section in which Timon begins to fall is marked in part by intense fluctuations of hot and cold, with an overall increase in temperature. “Let molten coin be thy damnation.” (3.1.38), is followed by Sempronius' anger (3.3.15), and “hot ardent zeal / would set whole realms on fire” (3.3.32 – 33). These images are soon followed by the deepest winter in Timon's purse (3.4.20), along with other wintry imagery. The four white and silver horses (1.2.168), also signals the arrival of Ovid's (and Hesiod's) Silver Age, with its four seasons, and the close of the Golden Age, matching Timon's financial collapse. Timon makes a possible allusion to the Iron Age when he activates a pun through the words “iron heart”. (3.4.81) The approach of winter, related to the sun, a fire icon, is rendered in the scene in which the servants of Timon's creditor meet at the opening of Act 3, Scene 4.

The situation leading to the increased heat of fire imagery, associated with choler, may ironically be related to a lack of warmth. Flavius says of the senators who would not assist Timon “They froze me into silence” (2.2.213), and Timon replies “Their blood is [...] cold [...] / 'Tis lack of kindly warmth they are not kind; / And nature as it grows again toward earth / Is fashioned for the journey dull and heavy.” (2.2.216 – 219) An element, earth was considered to have the qualities of being cold and dry, and with this coldness is a quality of decline, associated with a movement toward earth. This quote has a potential elemental meaning which may be interpreted as reverse alchemy. The dull and heavy qualities mentioned in the quote are attributed to lead. “The heaviest

common metal, [...] dull in appearance, lead [...] is at] the bottom of the traditional hierarchy of metals”, (Ferber 109) while [...] gold is the first of metals”. (Ferber 87)

Soon after images of fluctuating temperature, the overall heat of the play increases as fire rises as the dominant element. Timon enters in a rage in 3.4, and soon after Alcibiades meets with the senators (3.6); the tense atmosphere in these sections burns with excess choler. A brief cold, wet episode, of Flavius's ship sinking in water (at 4.2), is placed between two hot, angry acts. After Timon leaves Athens, the play's general pattern is one of high levels of fire in the form of choler, shown in the action and dialog, as well as the imagery, until water images win over fire at the conclusion. At 4.3.444 – 445, when Timon addresses the thieves, the sea takes salt tears from the moon, which, unlike the sun, is cold. (Ferber 130) This poetically signals the approach of water as the main element, which will replace fire at the conclusion. When vast Neptune is said to weep, invoking the image of a sea of tears, water becomes the main element of the play.

Just as a character may develop in the course of a narrative, so too may imagery. Tears, as depicted in the course of the play's events and imagery, develop to become both more sincere and greater in abundance. Regarding the increased abundance of tears, this is foreshadowed by the Poet's sea of wax. “Wax” not only means the wax which was used for writing on in the olden days, it can also mean “growing or growth” (Dawson, Minton 164), which sets up the corresponding sea of tears at the conclusion. Regarding the sincerity of the water-tears image, it appears in the first section of the work as disreputable in nature, when Timon and his fair weather friends weep in a manner so superficial and so based upon pretense that it seems artificial, the deserved object of Apemantus's ridicule. This is not the case with Flavius, who mentions his tears and then cries (2.2.163, 175), and his tears return significantly when he meets Timon in the wilderness. Flavius's tears and the sea of tears are depicted with greater sincerity than those of Timon and false friends.

The Poet's sea of wax at the opening precisely the corresponding water and wax image at the end of the play, the wax casting of Timon's tomb by the sea. Just as the tears of flattery in the early section are replaced towards the end by the more profound tears of a

loyal and virtuous man, Flavius, so too the flattering poet's water image is replaced by a more powerful water icon, the tears of a god, Neptune. The word "sea" itself of course represents the largest body of water in the world. Thus the a sea of growth functions to expand and transform into the sea of Neptune's continual tears at the end.

The sea of tears is a water image which abundantly neutralizes the fire image of choler which was dominant throughout most of the play, shown in its action through anger and conflict. The concluding water image emphasizes one of the play's central themes, the victory of mercy and gentleness, by occurring together with Alcibiades' mercy towards Athens, choosing peace instead of war. An example of the depiction of elemental imagery in relation to peace, in Jacobean England, is found in a speech written by Middleton, which was part of the coronation ceremonies of King James I. In this speech, it is observed that the elements respond to the peaceful presence of the king: "Earth not devouring, Fire not defacing, / Water not drowning, and the Air not chasing". (Bergeron "Pageants, Masques, and History" 48) While this thesis does not recognize Middleton's collaboration on *Timon* as a fact, this example of the elements depicted in relation to peace represents a prominent event in the milieu of Shakespeare's London, and a part of the culture in which Shakespeare's works were produced.

Timon's Elemental Imagery in Relation to Gender Stereotypes

Timon has few female characters, and those who do appear in the play represent women in a socially peripheral manner, for example in the brief appearances of prostitutes (who are insulted by Timon, yet give him flattery for gold) and Amazons (who have masculine qualities in the culture of Renaissance Europe). Both masculine and feminine attributes are rendered in the work through a number of the male characters. The effeminate qualities of Timon and his entourage, while in Athens, and Flavius, both in Athens and in the wilderness, are enhanced by the elemental imagery and action of the play. The water icon, shown primarily through the image of tears is labeled as being connected with women and children, and contrasted with masculine behavior, at 1.2.63, 1.2.91 –6, and 4.3.487 – 490. At the beginning of the play, in Timon's home, the speech is full of references to pregnancy, thus expressing femininity. The feminine water image

of joyful tears coming to one's eyes is described with the words “born” and “conception”. (1.2.91 – 94) At a roughly corresponding point towards the end of the play, Flavius weeps and Timon describes him as a woman because of his tears. (4.3.487 – 488) Cupid, the god of love, says that Timon has a generous heart with the words “plenteous bosom”. (1.2.108) There are some exceptions to this pattern, such as Neptune weeping, but the femininity of tears is generally emphasized in the play. Effeminate men (in the case of Flavius, labeled in the poetics of the dialog as female), represent water, they cry.

Like the play's conclusion, the opening sections of *Timon* are saturated with water icons, for example the frequent references to flows, often in connection with money, and the tears of Timon and the flatterers. In the first section of the drama, water images include the confluence and great flood of Timon's entourage (1.1.51), largely depicted as flatterers seeking their fortune, financial flows (“he pours it out” at 1.1.295) and wine. (1.2.51 – 53, 92 – 93.) Apemantus is given a prominent antithetical role of combativeness, aligned with the element of fire. He strives to lower the altitude of the flattering revelers with their abusive air of words, to bring them down to earth.

Timon of Athens shows a pattern of gender associations. The following gender associations of the imagery of *Timon of Athens* are discussed here in relation to their historical context, and traditional gender roles of Renaissance England.

The fire icon, as choler, is consistently aligned with virile men. In the play's characterization, action and dialog, virile men are men of choler, they are combative. The elemental alignment of choler applies to Alcibiades prior to the concluding sections, the senators, Apemantus, and Timon in the wilderness. The manly nature of combativeness, linked to choler, is expressed by Alcibiades in his speech to the senators: “Why do fond [“fond” : “foolish” (Bate 1774)] men expose themselves to battle, / And not endure all threats? Sleep upon't, (“sleep upon't” means “disregard it”) / And let the foes quietly cut their throats / Without repugnancy? If there be / Such valour in the

bearing, what make we / Abroad? (“what ... abroad?” means “why do soldiers go and fight?”) Why then, women are more valiant / That stay at home [...] / If wisdom be in suffering.” (3.6.44 – 53) While men (of fire and choler) fight, women (of tears and water) do not, instead they stay at home. In the words of Alcibiades, “[...W]ho is man that is not angry?” (3.6.59) This is iterative in Shakespeare. As Andrew Gurr points out (Gurr 25), in *Richard II*, fire is the element of rage, while water is yielding (seen for example in the dialogue at 3.3.54 – 60). And when Mowbray and Bullingbrook display their choler early in the play, Mowbray rejects what he calls “a woman's war”, meaning an argument of words, in favor of masculine physical combat between the two. In contrast with fire's heat in choler, Mowbray call his mere words, which he associates with women, cold (traditionally, one of the properties of the element of water). (1.1.47 – 50)

In contrast to fire and anger, the water of tears is assigned to women. The characters who do the actual crying in the play are men, because none of the central characters in the play are female, but these men are placed in effeminate roles. For most of the play, the dominant elemental image is fire connected with choler, until water begins to encroach upon this element when Flavius weeps, and finally extinguishes it at the climax and conclusion, as tears fill the sea. When tears are wept by Flavius, showing his loyalty, Timon, temporarily moved, says “What, dost thou weep? Come nearer. Then I love thee / Because thou art a woman” (4.3.487 – 88), and “Surely, this man / Was born of woman.” (4.3.498 – 99) The femininity of tears is iterative in Shakespeare, “[...] I am weaker than a woman's tear [...]” says Troilus. (*Troilus and Cressida* 1.1.9) Water also has female associations. At 4.3.1– 3, in apostrophizing the sun, Timon mentions “thy sister's orb”, meaning the moon; the moon being presented as the *sister* of the sun in this context. The moon was a water emblem, associated with the element of water; and its gender was feminine in the classical tradition. (Bate 1780, Ferber 129 – 131)

The feminine portrayal in *Timon* is both approving and disapproving. Weeping is poetically labeled as effeminate when Flavius weeps, feminine tears being depicted as virtuous. Females are also described by Timon as being close to flatterers, but men are the actual thing, in a strange mixing of genders; Timon emasculates their image, using

femininity in association with false friends, though he also links his flatterers to men in the same passage, so this is a somewhat peripheral point. (4.3.332 – 333) The comparison of unfaithful flatterers to women shows similarity to the anonymous *Timon* comedy, in which Timon says that women are unfaithful. (Anonymous, Dawson Minton 381)

Tears, thematically important, occur only at or near the beginning and end, at the “edges” of the text, most of which is otherwise reserved for men who are usually combative, displaying excessive amounts of fiery choler. This thematically related motif, emphasized in the play's elemental strategy, may account for the lack of women in *Timon*, commented upon in various editions of the play. (Bate 1744, Jowett 36) Apemantus describes melancholy (which, in the form of a humor is linked to earth, not water, but in any case is not manly choler) as unmanly (4.3.214). Earlier he says he does not trust the tears of a harlot (a female) (1.2.61 – 63).

The second major division of the play, of Timon's state as a fallen magnate, is a far more masculine phase, in which fire, primarily as choler, ascends to become the dominant element, together with much depiction of all four elements presented in inverted, conflicting or destructive manifestations. This is a more masculine section because of its generally angry and combative nature, which is linked to men in the text. The concluding section might be seen to have a return of feminine characteristics, and it portrays a harmonious relationship of masculinity and femininity, as womanly tears of love begin to gradually win over the fire of virile anger when Flavius meets Timon (4.3.461 – 540), and near the conclusion with the image of vast Neptune weeping over Timon's grave.

Chapter Three

Jacobean Economic Issues Related to *Timon*

Cleanth Brooks, though noted for his focus on structure, suggests that to better understand Shakespeare, one should have should understand his world view and reality. (Brooks *The Well Wrought Urn* 213) This of course includes the economy of his day, and as *Timon* is often categorized as an economic work, it is fitting to look at aspects of Jacobean economics and related culture, and find where they might resonate with aspects of *Timon* and its imagery.

England was in dire financial shape during the reign of James I, yet it seems he was not impressed by these fiscal problems when he was new to the throne; “[...] he spent lavishly, [and] turned a blind eye to his courtiers' corruption [...], with the result that the war debt he had inherited from Elizabeth grew and grew into the greatest deficit in English history.” (Jones “Shakespeare's England” 33) It has been commonly observed in prominent discourse on *Timon* that King James I's munificence in gift-giving resembled Timon's. “Lines such as Plutus the god of gold / is but his steward [... (1.1.295 – 6)] may activate an ironic pun on the King's surname Stuart, which is [...] a Scottish variant of 'Steward'. If so, attributes of James are distributed between Timon, the James-like wastrel, and the Steward, [Flavius], who represents the characteristics of stewardship that should properly be denoted by the royal name.” (Jowett 50)

Economic and Social Conditions of Renaissance London and Stereotypes of Femininity

Issues of debt and profligacy are still relevant in contemporary society, and should not seem strange to us. However the Jacobean world was in many ways extremely different in its associations and priorities – it was for example a world in which the judicial system took an interest in witchcraft – and it should come as no surprise that economic and social issues could be taken in directions radically different than those of today. What might seem outlandish depiction in our age, may have been verisimilitude in the Renaissance.

In addition to the royal extravagance mentioned above, other economic factors may be linked to the work. “[*Timon* speaks to] changes that were occurring during the early modern period; the economic world was shifting inexorably, with a feudal economy giving way to a nascent capitalist one.” (Dawson, Minton 78) An important economic factor in Jacobean England was the boom in consumerism which occurred in London around the time that *Timon* was produced. The effects and associations linked to this phenomenon have resonance in *Timon*.

London's Consumer Culture was Linked by King James to the Influx of Gentry Into the Capital.

The commercial wealth of London during the Jacobean period, and the accompanying rise in consumerism which occurred, while an object of celebration for some, was also controversial, and for others it occasioned anxiety. “The acquisitive drive on which [... London's wealth was based had an uneasy relationship] with the dictates of Christian morality.” “Middleton [wrote several...] pageants which celebrated the benefits of the city's wealth, [but he] also wrote comedies which [...exposed ... greedy] charlatans operating within the capital.” (Archer 45, 46) While (to reiterate) this thesis treats Middleton's authorship of *Timon* as unproven, both he and Shakespeare shared the environment of London and it would not be surprising if both were familiar with the public discourse concerning the consumerism controversy.

A related economic discussion was tied to other social issues of the changing capital, occurring against the backdrop of tensions linked to the influx of gentry into London. “Other anxieties focused on the challenge to conventional social ordering entailed by the culture of consumption. A stream of largely ineffective proclamations instructed the gentry to return to their rural estates [...]. [... James I said] in a speech of 1616, 'as every fish lives in his own place, some in the fresh, some in the salt, some in the mud [...], so let everyone live in his own place, some at court, some in the city, some in the

country'.” (Archer 46)

“Maintaining social order was of central importance to the government of Renaissance England, and the flocking of the gentry to London was potentially a threat to this social order. In addition to the stability of the countryside being undermined in as a result of this situation (Archer 46), “[... a] source of tension within the metropolis was the presence of large numbers of gentry. In the course of one week in June 1584 [... three serious brawls were reported ...] between gentlemen and apprentices and a fray between two gentlemen. Although the violence of the gentry was gradually being subdued by new honour codes influenced by humanist and Protestant discourses stressing moderation, sobriety and self-restraint, elements of the traditional honour culture of lineage persisted, and the feuds of the gentry often spilled out on to the streets of the capital.” (Archer 50, 51)

The Jacobean Consumer Boom and Gender Stereotypes

The relocation of gentry to London, problematic to James I, was associated with both economic and gender factors. “[T]he emulative habits of consumption fostered by the metropolitan environment threatened to erode conventional social boundaries of age and gender.” In 1572, the mayor complained in a proclamation about excesses in apparel and fashion regarding members of particular classes, and this formed the basis for later regulative drives. The prodigality of Timon by which he cultivates his appearances is similar to opinions and complaints about women in relation to the public discussion concerning the consumption controversy of the time, in which the claim was made that women were driving excessive spending on fashionable attire. “Foreigners like Frederick of Wurttemberg, visiting London at the turn of the century, were impressed by the exceedingly fine clothes of London women of relatively meager means, [... and he claimed that they gave excessive attention to their clothing, many of them not hesitating to wear velvet in the streets, while at home perhaps they did not have a piece of dry bread.]” (Archer 46, 47) “[C]onsumption was seen as a predominantly female activity, James I attributing the flocking of the gentry to London to the pressure of their wives, 'because the new fashion is to be had nowhere but in London'”. (Archer 46, 47) The

relating of such gender paradigms to economic issues may be seem remarkable from a contemporary viewpoint; yet such linkage occurred in the economic discourse of Renaissance London. Although the perpetrators of the violence associated with the gentry in the example given above are all described as gentlemen, King James, in addressing the issue of the gentry's influx onto London, specifically attributed the problem to pressure from women and consumer economics.

Economic similarities with Timon's general extravagance and free spending were therefore found, not only in the milieu of the monarch, but on the streets of a changing capital as well in the form rising consumerism; not on as grand a scale as King James, on the part of the individual commoners involved, but perhaps at a grander and more socially prominent level in aggregate, as the consumerism of the metropolis would have involved a far greater portion of the citizenry. And a stereotype with regard to this phenomenon, whether accurate or not, was that women were driving the consumer boom, and spending on their appearances. In this discussion, it was sometimes said that women spent more than they could afford on the cultivation of their outward image.

Returning to one of the thesis questions: "In what ways are the centrality of economic themes supported, or challenged, by this play, its imagery, and its historical context?", there is a pattern in the elemental imagery which emerges, which can be related to associations with feminine stereotypes, both economic and non-economic, in a Jacobean audience. Whether or not the activation of these stereotypes actually took place as a result of watching *Timon*, or whether this was the author's intention, is of course beyond the scope of this thesis, and is not presented here as an incontrovertible assertions of fact. However the patterns of the play's imagery and its historical context do coincide in plausible ways.

In the section of this thesis about elemental imagery and gender stereotypes, the effeminate nature of Timon, while residing in Athens, as well as his entourage, was discussed. (This contrasts with the more combative and masculine portrayal during the phase when Timon resides in the wilderness.) The more effeminate portrayal, during the

phase when Timon is in Athens, has a potential correspondence to the economically related feminine stereotypes of London in the early 1600s delineated above.

Timon, is a prodigal who, in return for his “investment”, receives the social prestige of praise, in terms of outward appearances. Apemantus tells his “When thou wast in thy gilt and thy perfume, they mocked thee for too / much curiosity [...]” (4.3.320 – 1) (“gilt” means “gold, money, lavish adornments”) (“curiosity” means “fastidiousness, delicate refinement”) In Jacobean London, women were sometimes labeled, at least approximately, as prodigals, guilty of too much curiosity, who spent more money than they could afford for the enhancement of their appearances. As such association between women and prodigality, and excessive cultivation of outward appearances, was part of the public social and economic discussion around the time *Timon* was written, Timon's image-building prodigality may have corresponded to a certain femininity for the play's early audiences. The plausible consonances and affinities, between *Timon's* economic mimesis and the surrounding culture in which the work was produced, include these prominent views of Jacobean London, related to consumerism and associated feminine stereotypes.

The Depiction of Money

In *Timon's* range of themes, money and economics are often depicted satirically or otherwise critically, for example when the Poet and Painter, even after recognizing the deceitful conduct of the flatterers at the start of the play, engage in the same behavior for lucre, to a farcical degree. The farcical property of satirical economic depiction extends across a range of other economic episodes as well, for example when Timon attacks his creditors. Nevertheless, while depicting negatives sides of wealth and money, the play also depicts money as a reward for virtue, when Timon gives gold to Flavius for his loyalty. There is no depiction of Flavius rejecting his pecuniary acquisition. One might argue that this is another example of the play's portrayal of the discrepancy between words and deeds, yet the overall depiction of Flavius shows his deeds as being virtuous, for example his loyalty to Timon (4.3.461 – 540), and his sharing of wealth with his fellow servants (4.2.30 – 2). Perhaps the strongest criticism of wealth in the play

is given by Flavius (4.2.34 – 5), because, as a virtuous character, he has a stronger claim as to act as a thematic spokesman. All the central characters in the play, whether virtuous or not, utter words which activate important thematic constituents, as part of the poetics in the play. Because Flavius and Alcibiades, is portrayed as especially virtuous, their statements and actions have added value in terms of theme.

Despite the economic critique of the play, for example the lampooning of money when Timon gives gold to prostitutes (4.3.141 – 176), the *degree* of monetary criticism in the play is lessened by its primary critics of money, Timon and Apemantus, who are hampered in their economic carping by their characterization, as being consistently extremist. (An aspect of their characterization which will be discussed further in the following chapter.) As extremists they express standpoints on money, which at times fail to be consonant with Jacobean society and Shakespeare's own lifestyle.

Additionally, if *Timon* is actually a comedy, and not a tragedy, this has the potential to make the play's economic stricture ironic. One may argue that the play is a satire (Dawson, Minton 3), and as a satire, it criticizes money. However Shakespeare's *Timon* exhibits signs of being based upon earlier traditions of the Timon character (previously mentioned), which are seen in some of the source materials for the play; in these, Timon is a character intended to be laughed at or observed with curiosity.” (Dawson, Minton 19) Additionally, *Timon's* property as a mixed genre may be a factor – arguably, it is a comedy in which Timon is a ranting social type. (Yachnin 54) The degree of criticism towards money would be affected by the degree to which the play makes fun of either the economic system, or its critics (like Timon). If the intention is to laugh at Timon and Apemantus, their complaints about money, gold and wealth, might not be taken seriously by a Jacobean audience. Timon presents reality in an unusual or distorted manner, along the lines of the artistic effects extolled by Sklovsky. (Shklovsky 24), but not necessarily using rhetoric which strengthens a thematic statement that gold and money are detrimental.

Elemental Emblems Might Impair Timon's Claims

Timon's soliloquies are often highly elemental, at times apostrophizing all four elements

in a manner resembling a prayer. For example at 4.3.1 – 3, he invokes fire – “blessed breeding sun”, earth – “draw from the earth”, water – “thy sister's orb”, meaning the moon (Bate 1780) which, as the watery planet (the moon was regarded as a planet, like a sister of the sun, and associated with the element of water), was connected with the element of water (Hibbard 235, Ferber 129 – 131), and air, which he requests to be infected. Timon combines elements in a manner which shows his intent is a lack of harmony or proper order, or the employment elements to harm others.

Timon's elemental speech shows signs of being inverted, for example when he speaks of the toad, adder, newt and eyeless venomous worm. (4.3.192 – 3) The toad and newt were believed poisonous in Shakespeare's day, the adder is poisonous, and the eyeless venomous worm is depicted as having venom. The eyeless venomous worm is the slowworm (“slowworm” : “a type of lizard without legs which looks like a snake”), which is actually not blind, nor poisonous, nor a worm. (Jowett 281) “The colours [of the animals] are neither naturalistic nor associated with the animals in question. [...A]s an offspring of the earth, the gilded newt connects with the gold Timon has found.” (Jowett 281) The exact choice of colors, together with the *eyeless* quality of the slowworm, has poetic potential in terms of elemental and celestial imagery. The first pair of creatures are black and blue, the prevailing colors of the sky at night and in the day. The second pair of creatures are described as gilded – hinting at the color of the sun in the daytime sky, and eyeless – hinting at the night sky's lack of the sun. As Ferber points out, Ovid calls the sun “the eye of the world” in *Metamorphoses*, and Shakespeare call it “the eye of heaven” in Sonnet 18. (Ferber 210) In Timon's speech, heavenly attributes might be seen as degraded and brought down earth and venomous earthly inhabitants, seeming to create a confused clash of heaven and earth. Just as the earth has sky-like features, so too the sky is given earth-like attributes. This occurs when Timon speaks of the marbled mansion, meaning the sky, which through pun can mean “having marble”, which, as stone, is earth. (4.3.202) These poetic details are consonant with the cosmic disorder which Timon cultivates throughout most of the play, a viewpoint of confused elemental and celestial opposites, also corresponding to his assault on order and social rank, for example when he leaves Athens, in Act 4, Scene 1.

“Ideas of order in the Renaissance were [... formed in relation to] notions of how the cosmos was organized. [...] It was believed that God had created the universe as a system of multiple, corresponding hierarchies.” (Orlin *Shakespeare: An Oxford Guide* 141) In *Timon*, the protagonist seeks to upset order and hierarchy. From the perspective of Renaissance England, the world was largely arranged in relation to hierarchy, and disturbing the cosmic or social order, for example by rebellion, might lead to deleterious consequences. Ulysses in *Troilus and Cressida* says that without hierarchy, the elements become mixed in such a way as to lack harmony, with water overflowing the shore which has once been its boundary, and social disorder results, with the son killing the father.; Orlin refers to such cosmic and discord as “radical inversion”. (Orlin 141 – 3) This radical inversion is one of the primary manifestations of elemental imagery in *Timon*, in addition to the play's choler-fire versus water images. Among the play's war images, which align with anger and choler, there is a depiction of radical inversion of the elements of earth and air, when one of the senators speaks of the movement of enemy troops as choking the air with dust. (5.2.17 – 18) Whether the play is regarded as a comedy, a tragedy, or otherwise, Timon's manner of invoking the elements and attacking social institutions make him odious to a Renaissance audience, as he violates their values. Statements of chaos, and conflicting elemental juxtaposition, depicted in the play, have a potential relation to early modern notions of order, and the ominous consequences of transgressing customs of hierarchy.

Notions of hierarchy, and their relation to norms of conduct, are integral to Renaissance England's political history, well illustrated by the conflict between two of Queen Elisabeth's courtiers, the Earl of Oxford and Philip Sidney. It threatened to lead to a duel, which, if it had occurred, would have produced a serious tear in the fabric of the Elizabethan court. Of the two men, Sidney was the inferior in rank. Elizabeth prevented the duel, by using her authority over the two men; and, according to Fulke Greville, Sidney's friend and contemporary biographer, by seeking to persuade Sidney to abandon his duel “by evoking the values of hierarchy and harmony of the court [...]” For Queen Elisabeth, “good order in the kingdom depended on a great chain of being, maintained by her majesty and power ; [... a] breach [in this hierarchy] threatened chaos. The same vision is manifested in the Church of England's “Homily on Obedience,” and in Ulysses'

oft-quoted speech on order in Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*." (Sacks "Political Culture" 125 –9) Timon, calling for chaos and the upsetting of hierarchy, violates such norms and is, from a Renaissance perspective, an odious spokesman, poorly suited to render a convincing attack on gold or money.

Timon's requests, in Act 4, Scene 1, that a number of civilized institutions decline to their opposites, after which he exclaims "And yet confusion live!" In this speech, he sets himself against the norms of Jacobean society. In terms of characterization, Timon is portrayed as inconsistent, in that his speech to the gods about gold (4.3.29 – 30), protests the type of social inversion which he himself tries to cause after leaving Athens. His failure of consistency is portrayed when he labels gold as deleterious, because he claims it causes the things he himself is consistently trying to do.

Despite *Timon's* abundance of economic critique and satire, it is not in fact the case that money is consistently presented as detrimental, nor the associated subject of wealth, nor gold. Timon may complain bitterly about the incompatibility of gold's constituents, but the action of the play at times provides a contrasting perspective, and the subject of blending of seemingly incompatible factors is not necessarily disapproving in itself. Poetically, the merging of seemingly incompatible factors in gold has the capacity to present poetics similar to the celebratory ironic structures found iteratively in Shakespeare's cannon, potentially representing a bond which unifies seemingly disparate forces and outweighing their opposition. Timon and Apemantus might protest against gold and economic affluence, but the frequently displayed flaws and unreasonable extremism in their characterization undermine the authority of their assertions. As discussed by Ewbank, some of Shakespeare's characters can use false rhetoric, which is a sign of duplicity. And "sometimes it is what a character feels, and not what he ought to say, that is expressed through elaborate rhetoric [...]." (Ewbank "Shakespeare and the Arts of Language" 59)

In the case of Timon's characterization, gold is beneficial enough to reward Flavius for his honesty and virtue. Arguably, Timon's inconsistencies might imitate the incompatibilities associated with gold, and yet these same inconsistencies of the protagonist tend to mitigate Timon's negative portrayal of the substance itself, leavening

its representation.

Though the play's portrayal of usurers and lucre is often negative, it is questionable to what degree *Timon* is a play of financial protest, given the background of its author. "Shakespeare's business acumen must have been quite exceptional" and in the course of time he prospered. Shakespeare sued at least two persons for debt, indicating that, personally, he took the repayment of debt seriously. (Honigmann "Shakespeare's Life" 5 – 6) A letter written to Shakespeare, asking for a loan was couched in terms which indicated he might drive a hard bargain. (Honigmann 7) Information about Shakespeare and his family seem to indicate that usury, investment and other comparable money-making endeavors were part of their way of life, for example Shakespeare's investment in an enclosure (essentially a form of privatization, and, some might argue, stealing from the poor), and his father's large loans at illegal rates of interest. (Honigmann 6 – 7) Thus one can question whether usury and economic grasping was a subject of *personal* protest in Shakespeare's works thematically.

Usury was definitely controversial (Klein 13 – 15), but the biographical data on Shakespeare and his family, scant though it is, tends to weigh the scales of judgment away from a personal distaste for usury and private enterprise on Shakespeare's part, though usury would have been good stock plot component for creating villains, etc., as shown in the laws and discussion about it during the period. (Klein 13 – 15) While this is of course not enough to dismiss usury and economics as an important thematic factor (Shakespeare's personal economic values may not be expressed in *Timon*), the lack of connection with Shakespeare's background and personal lifestyle does little to strengthen it as a motivation for a strong theatrical agenda, other than the previously mentioned value of usury as a popular plot component for theater – in other words, usury's bad image was, as a dramatic subject, probably good for theatrical art, and perhaps beneficial for business as well.

An example of Shakespeare theatrically using denial of money as a means of punishment is found in *The Merchant of Venice*. Shylock, as a villain, is penalized by the play's system of justice by having to forfeit part of his fortune. If money is

detrimental in *The Merchant of Venice*, then it would not likely be a great punishment to lose it. There are even signs that Shakespeare himself, in his will, might have used the denial of wealth as a means to punish his wife. (Honigmann 8)

In many ways, the play is an economic critique, seen for example Timon's disloyal friends who abandon him after he loses his wealth, and the scene with the prostitutes in Act 4, Scene 3. However wealth is a means of stature in the play, and its scarcity determines Timon's fall from the heights of power, much as political sovereignty in *Richard II*. Furthermore, in *Timon* wealth is not the exclusive subject of stricture: the opposing poverty-images of Apemantus' and Timon's asceticism are thoroughly lampooned in the action on stage.

Alternatives to the Centrality of Economics in *Timon*

Despite the relative ambivalent attitude towards the pursuit of wealth on the part of the four major characters, a substantial portion of their dialog and action is directed at the subject of wealth, or the lack of it. This being stated, it would not be profitable to make the error of overvaluing gold and other references to wealth in the drama, by making such an emphasis at too great a cost to the appreciation of other themes.

What Bate refers to as Shakespeare's "double vision" – Shakespeare's ability to mingle such diverse factors as comedy and tragedy, old feudal ways and bourgeois ambitions, etc. (Bate 365) – is under-recognized in much criticism of *Timon of Athens*. In prominent critical commentary provided with editions of the play, economic factors possess a near monopoly in terms of the thematic discussion. True, gold and money are mantras of the play, however when viewed from the perspectives of its characterization, poetics and action, and its use of cosmic imagery, the economic factors may be discovered to be less than overarching. *Timon* is more than one play, depending upon which aspects of the Jacobean world we approach it with, as can be seen in both the concrete action on stage, and in the poetics of the text, and it is capable of transcending its own economic narrative.

Timon's Jacobean economic themes, and the subjects of gold and money, have resonance in the play's elemental imagery, and the same might be said about aspects the play's gender depiction, which itself has affinities with Jacobean economic issues. However, the play's depiction of non-economic themes is shown in its imagery and poetics, the characterization of the major figures in the work, and by the action on stage. It might be said that, in certain respects, the means of the economic story are its outer surface, while the ends of the play are its deeper emotional and philosophical themes.

The protagonist's return to a state of wealth, when he finds gold, does not return him to either his previous state of luxury, nor to his formerly kind generosity. Timon's misanthropic attitude generally remains unchanged after he finds gold; he rants, and throws stones at the Poet and Painter, and his newfound wealth is employed to subvert society. His gifts of gold are all means of destruction from his expressed viewpoint, with the *single* exception of Flavius. The fact that the protagonist does not return to his previous lifestyle, once economic factors which would allow him to do so have been restored, indicates that *Timon* is more than an economic play; wealth is once again in Timon's hands, yet Timon does not return. Something has changed which money fails to repair, indicating that far more than financial vicissitudes are explored in the work. The remainder of this thesis will focus primarily upon alternatives to the play's pecuniary themes.

Chapter Four

Other Sides of the Coin: Alternatives to *Timon's* Economic Themes

In relation to the to the thesis question, “In what ways are the centrality of economic themes supported, or challenged, by this play, its imagery, and its historical context?” the previous chapters primarily explored and discussed *Timon's* economic depiction. This chapter will focus upon alternatives to Timon's economic features.

Timon is the hater of mankind. An exceptions to this, when he meets with Flavius, though brief, is so significant that it should not be overlooked as an event tied to important themes. Timon is given a look at deeper feelings when Flavius shows him tears and loyalty. This is an important moment in the action of the play, because it is the exception to Timon's otherwise constant and undifferentiating hatred after he leaves Athens. This takes place well after Flavius has an economic interest in Timon, and the dialog of Flavius shortly before meeting Timon shows no personal economic incentive (as opposed to the Poet and Painter). The fact that Flavius seeks Timon for reasons outside the world of economics is a strong indicator of important non-economic themes present within the work.

Prior to Flavius, Apemantus also meets with Timon, also for non-economic reasons. Like the meeting with Flavius, the meeting of Timon and Apemantus is also a major event in the play, because, among other reasons, Timon speaks of his future death. In doing so, he says “I am sick of this false world [...]”. (4.3.378) Though he also apostrophizes gold in the same speech, it is the falseness of the world which he experiences that leads to Timon's expression of his death, “Timon, [...] prepare thy grave [...]”. (4.3.380) Two highly important events of the drama, Timon's expression of his death and the exception to his general hatred, after he has left Athens, occur within the context of situations which are primarily non-economic.

The early economic depiction setting up the conditions for Timon's fall are also the means by which the betrayal of Timon is portrayed, and the means by which the actual,

hidden inner feelings of the flatterers are brought to the surface. Timon, in his characterization is given exposure to these inner feelings by the outer economic forces to which he is subjected; the play explores more than these outer economic forces, and the themes of the play are not exclusively about economics.

The discrepancy between inner feelings and outer displays is a central component of the play's themes. This aligns with themes of actuality versus falseness or superficial appearances. These thematic factors in *Timon* augment, or possibly even transcend, the economic aspects of the play.

The forces of inner emotion are capable of overpowering outer economic ones in the action of the play. Though Timon's financial collapse is on a grand scale, it is trivial and mundane compared to the extent of his degradation as the hater of all men, among Shakespeare's most cruel characters, who encourages war and the killing of innocent people without mercy. The reasons Timon gives for hating every man are weak, and the degree of his degradation is better explained by his emotions and his failure to master his hate with reason and a balancing philosophy.

As mentioned earlier in this thesis in the discussion on humor, Ben Jonson in *Every Man in His Humour* speaks of humor as “a monster”, and wrote that it was caused by such things as affectation, encouraged by fashionable ostentation, and not restrained by good sense. Jonson treats humour as a monstrous distortion of human nature. (Gillie 571) These flaws of Timon include affectation and fashionable ostentation, cultivated excessively when he is wealthy in Athens. His lack of restraint by good sense is shown throughout almost the entirety of the play. In addition, his lack of control of his passions, which he expresses through destructive actions, indicate his lack of reason.

Timon tears off his clothes, becoming naked (4.1.33), and lives in the wilderness. This depiction may be said to cause him to resemble a beast. His hatred of mankind may function as a separation of himself from humanity, resembling or portraying Timon's descent from the state of man to the state of beast. In English Renaissance belief, such a decline could be linked to a failure to prevent a state of prevailing chaos and savagery.

(Orlin 141 – 3) In the wilderness, Timon's speeches and actions primarily support chaos and savagery. Additionally, Timon's failure to respect order and hierarchy, a trait which he displays abundantly, might also be related to a failure to respect the hierarchy of mankind's superior rank to beasts. If Timon's passions were intended by Shakespeare to resemble those of a beast, it might be a sign of a lack of reason in Timon's characterization. Animal passion was, in Renaissance England, commonly contrasted with man's reason. (Gurr 86) Timon is rarely depicted as cultivating good sense, instead, he fails to master his passions, and he is portrayed as lacking proper reason. Thematic depiction of man and beast is seen in the discussion between Timon and Apemantus (4.3.339 – 353), and the Soldier's statement near the conclusion of the drama. (5.3.4) Whether or not Timon's portrayal is linked to his position in the hierarchy of humans and beasts in Renaissance English belief, he is in any case labeled by Alcibiades as lacking reason (4.3.93 – 94); and Flavius describes Timon's behavior as senseless. (2.2.1) This interpretation of Timon's characterization also aligns with the lack of good sense linked to excessive choler, expressed by Ben Jonson. Timon's lack of good sense and reason is a central part of his characterization, and can be related to important themes in the play.

Timon's lack of good sense and reason is linked to another of his flaws as a character, which is his frequent lack of perceiving or understanding actual reality when it differs from appearances. Early in the play, the negligence or treachery of his so-called friends was hidden by their social displays. He blames gold for bringing about the greed which led to his betrayal, and yet he uses gold to reward the *lack of greed* shown by Flavius, indicating his lack of consistency on the subject. Though wealth played a role in Timon's betrayal, wealth and gold are not the same as the false friends who betrayed him. He did not see this when he was a magnate in Athens until it was too late, and he fails to see actuality in the wilderness. He blames all men for the evil of a few, and he blames gold. One might ask: if gold is to blame, then why are his false friends guilty? If his false friends are to blame, then why are other people generally also guilty? As a character, a lack of good sense, and cruelty, are Timon's principle flaws. The lack of good sense to bring about restraint, related to his generalizations about mankind, is an negative facet of Timon's characterization, especially in the context of Jacobean

England, where it would have clashed with the prominent protestant discourse extolling moderation (referred to earlier).

This recurrent flaw in Timon is emphasized through the contrast of its exception, when Flavius meets him in the wild, and, touched by the loyalty and tears of Flavius, he says “Forgive my general and exceptionless rashness, / You perpetual sober gods! (4.3.500 – 1)

“exceptionless” : “universal, making no exceptions”

“perpetual sober” : “moderate”

While Protestantism is opposed to the pagan gods which Timon refers to, this would not rule out the influence of Protestantism in the favoring of moderation; and with or without Protestant influence, the extremism of Timon's negativity is presented in his characterization as a flaw.

The flaw of Timon's extremism and failure to differentiate between good and bad men is also found in Lucian's version of the Timon story (one of the sources for Shakespeare's *Timon*) in which Mercury tells Timon that all men do not deserve the extreme reaction which Timon has towards them. (Lucian, Dawson, Minton 348)

Eye and Vision Imagery

An important component of Timon's imagery is the play's set of eye and perception images. “Imagery which interprets, changes, and expands the meanings of the deeds we witness [...] is of course central to Shakespeare's art.” (Ewbank 63) In *Timon*, such imagery forms one of the play's central patterns of literary motifs, and is tied to its central set of themes.

The extremism in Timon's characterization is linked to his failures of adequate perception, and allowing his vision and other perceptions to be tricked or misled. This aspect of Timon's depiction may have been influenced by one of the play's sources, in

which eyes and the perception of vision are prominent features.

A very likely source for Shakespeare's *Timon* is the anonymous comedy *Timon* (dating from c. 1601 – 5). (Dawson , Minton 359) A fascinating aspect of the play is its frequent and significant use of the word “eye”, and language related to sight and tears. The following list shows examples of depictions of eyes / tears / vision in the comedy *Timon*:

In the comedy *Timon*, Timon's servant, named Laches, has a role corresponding to that of Flavius, a faithful servant who tries to warn Timon about his financial situation.

Laches says to Timon that he does not see, regarding his diminishing wealth.

(Anonymous, Dawson, Minton 360) Another sufferer of debt in the play, named Eutrapelus, has his hat pulled down over his eyes, and the money lender says he will not allow Eutrapelus's eyes to rest. Eutrapelus, speaking of his own sight, says he would rather see a basilisk, which can use its eyes to kill; there is also other association with eyes of the basilisk later in the play. (“basilisk” : “a mythical reptile whose stare is lethal”) (Anonymous, Dawson, Minton 362, 385) Timon mentions offering great quantities of tears. (Anonymous, Dawson, Minton 364) Timon threatens to pull out the eyes of Laches, and later Laches says he will remove another character's eyes. A character thinks he is blind, then his sight is restored. (Anonymous, Dawson, Minton 367, 369 – 70) Laches says “[...] no sun shines here. [...] Why are your eyes so fixed on the earth?” (Anonymous, Dawson, Minton 380) The eye is juxtaposed with the heart. (Anonymous, Dawson, Minton 373, 388) Timon says that gold reflects upon his eyes (Anonymous, Dawson, Minton 394) One character says that gold shines like fire and another character says it blinds his eyes; soon after gold is said to please the eyes. (Anonymous, Dawson, Minton 396 –7) A character wants to hide his treasure in the earth, away from human eyes. (Anonymous, Dawson, Minton 374) A character says that he cannot lament because his eyes are made of stone (Anonymous, Dawson, Minton 379), much as men who do not cry are described as being like flint in Shakespeare's *Timon*. (4.3.489)

This focus upon the eyes and vision is also thematically important in Shakespeare's

cannon. As in *King Lear*, and *Troilus and Cressida*, in *Timon* there is significant use of the word “eye”, as if calling to our attention themes related to sight, appearances and viewpoint. In the play, eyes may see reality or they may be deceived by false appearances. Eyes are also the source of tears, crucial to the play's set of images, and which, in the case of Flavius and Neptune, display deeper emotions that transcend false appearances. Timon, abusing or neglecting his perceptions, looks into a lying and distorted mirror which shows physical surfaces and social displays but not the truth.

Timon's Flawed Priorities of Perception

It is reasonable to maintain that the principle attitudes of a protagonist, and important other characterization features, present factors in a work which are likely to be significant in terms of theme. It is therefore also reasonable to take a closer look at the play, to find out if there are other signs that Timon is presented as lacking sense, etc., and if there are links between Timon's attitude and the play's themes. It is also reasonable to look for signs of links between the work's themes and the concept of superficial appearances versus actuality, as this subject is one of the primary problems dealt with in the work, for example in the depiction of false friends. Nuttall states that “Timon's generosity [... suggests ... a ...] competitive anxiety which is itself the opposite of real love; [... and that Timon gives] with his eyes shut tight [... concerning] the human reality surrounding him [...]”. (Nuttall 68)

A good example of Timon's failure to look deeper than surface displays, and his lack of good sense, is when Flavius informs him about his financial ruin, stating that he has previously tried to warn Timon. As Nuttall relates, Timon failure is more than innocently excessive generosity to those who will later betray him, he falls as a result of his own negligence. (Nuttall 50 –1) Flavius says he has earlier told Timon “To hold your hand more close.” (2.2.138) (“close” : “closed / not generous / close to your chest”) (Bate 1765, Hibbard 178, Jowett 219) If one interprets the definition of “close” to be “close to your chest”, and “chest” as meaning “the area of the heart”, then through pun this then sets up a contrast between the heart and deceived perceptions, a differentiation found in much of Shakespeare's writing. While this particular example of such a

differentiation is unclear, there are more obvious examples of this, which will be discussed later in this thesis.

The important point here is that Timon's characterization clearly includes his flawed priorities of perception; this particular flaw is also connected with his excessive belief in superficial appearances. It is also linked in the text to a statement by Flavius about humor and state of mind. Flavius complains about Timon's reckless spending and his humor, then says “ 'Tis pity bounty had not eyes behind [...]” (1.2.142 – 147) (“To not have an eye behind” : “to not be sufficiently wary about possible betrayal.”) (Dawson, Minton 195) In the case of Timon, this reaches ludicrous proportions. “Timon's own brand of ostentatious display makes the recipient the same person as the creditor.” (Jowett 50) However, the flatterer's deception is matched by Timon's, because, as a debtor who fails to keep his promises to repay, he also a liar, similar to Falstaff in *Henry IV* “Falstaff's chronic debts are [...] promises which he does not keep, [...] negations of the word as bond [...] and linked to] falsity.” (McAlindon, *Shakespeare's Tudor History* 118) Stricture regarding the delinquency of a debtor corresponds to the laws of ancient Rome (discussed in the first chapter). This aspect of Timon's depiction (the debtor's breaking of his word as bond) is not strongly emphasized – possibly due to the fact that Timon gives wealth back to his creditors in the form of gifts. However his lack of fiscal responsibility, is clearly portrayed in Act 2, Scene 2, and this relates to his priorities of perception.

Timon, in his characterization, is, as Nuttall points out, to some degree blind, negligent, and his generosity lacks actual love. Flavius, in his contrasting characterization, is consistently portrayed as virtuous and reliable, and his display of tears (2.2.165, 180, and again, late in the play) show the use of his eyes to be connected to the deeper feelings of his heart. According to Flavius, he has tried many times to bring Timon's financial situation to his attention, to no avail, since Timon has focused his priorities of perception upon the surface show of his prosperity. While in Athens, Timon fails to match his actions to his real circumstances until it is too late; this is due to his failure to look beyond the surface appearance of the comfort of his opulent lifestyle. There is no portrayal of him looking at the actuality of his assets until it is too late for him to make

ends meet, though he is depicted as perceiving the reality he is used to perceiving – one of abundance and pleasure – and turning a blind eye to the factual circumstances of his economic assets. Flavius on the other hand sees the actual situation, and has tried, to no avail, to get Timon to look at reality. (2.2.125 – 145) Indicating Timon's use of his perceptions, Flavius says to Timon “You would not hear me.” (2.2.125) Earlier Apemantus complains, in relation to Timon, about deafness to counsel but not to flattery. (1.2.238 – 9)

Important thematic constituents of the play are those of honesty versus dishonesty, and actuality versus falseness or superficial appearances. The treatment of these themes is central to the drama.

Appearances and Their Connection to the Physical World in Plato's Philosophy

In Plato's philosophy, physical objects are merely imperfect copies of the ideas upon which they are based. Physical objects, including their appearances, and the body's eyes which see them, exist in the physical world. The physical world may be perceived using perceptions of the human body. “Forms” means “the ideas upon which things of the physical world are based”. The ideas upon which physical objects are based exist separately from the physical world. The ideas are truer than the physical objects which are based upon them. Ideas are not physical things, they are connected with the mind, and have true existence. The shadow of an object is less real than the object itself, and physical objects are less real than ideas (the ideas having a greater degree of truth).

Phaedo is the title of a book by Plato. Phaedo is the name of a person in the book who speaks with Socrates. Plato stated, in his book *Phaedo*, “[...] idea or essence, which [...] we define as essence or true existence – whether essence of [...] beauty, or anything else – are these essences [...] liable at times to some degree of change? Or are they [...] always what they are, having the same simple [...] and unchanging forms, not admitting of variation at all, or in any way, or at any time? They must be always the same [...]. And [...] things which one may touch, see, and perceive with the senses are almost

always changing...] but the unchanging things you can only perceive with the mind.”
(Plato *Phaedo*, in *Great Books of the Western World*)

True existence is unchanging, and is perceived with the mind. Physical objects, perceived with the senses of the body are less real than those things which have true existence. From this viewpoint of Plato's philosophy, physical things, which are almost always changing, are less true. From this viewpoint, it is possible that merely perceiving them with the senses of the body, together with too low a degree of the mind perceiving true existence, might result in less overall perception of truth. By failing to sufficiently use the mind to perceive truth, and merely focusing on the physical senses of the body, perceiving what is less real, one might have a view of the world which is distorted or lacking in truth, and in such a state might be more vulnerable to lies and deception.

Such vulnerability matches much of what is observable in Timon's characterization. Timon's initial wealth is merely a surface show, and Timon and his flatterers cultivate outer appearances which are incompatible with honest reality. Timon's appearance of wealth does not represent his actual economic state, and the outer appearance of the flatterers conceal their false friendship.

The subject of appearances versus reality, which aligns with Plato's writing in *Phaedo*, is among the principal topics in the conversation between the Painter and the Poet at the opening of the play, especially when they discuss the portrait that seems to be of Timon himself. These two characters discuss subjects related to appearances and deceptive appearances. Shakespeare provides the audience with a discussion about these subjects as they have great significance in the play.

Just as Timon continues to give away his wealth when other characters meet him in the wilderness, he also continues to cultivate his focus and emphasis upon the mere superficial outer appearances of his fellow man. He generalizes when he states that all men are bad, and his act of generalizing is based on a lack of truth.

Timon's Tendency to Generalize and His Attitude about Appearances

The following quote of Timon , in which he talks about mankind, shows one of Timon's most important flaws.

“His semblable, yea, himself, Timon disdains.” (4.3.22)

(“semblable” means “likeness”) (“yea” means 1. “not only that, but also” 2. “yes”)

(“likeness” can mean appearance”.)

The depiction of this flaw in Timon shows his failure to differentiate properly. This is because he extends mankind's likeness (“semblable” means “likeness”), which can mean mankind's appearance, to man himself, the actual person and not the mere image. The image of man may refer to his appearance, a human's physical body which is visible to the eyes (which are also part of the physical body).

This lack of differentiation, between man, and man's mere image or appearance, occurs during a speech in which Timon gives his rhetoric as to why he thinks all men are bad. This occurs in Act 3, Scene 4. At first, his comparisons of those with greater and lesser fortunes is logical and moving. But at line 15, his logical argumentation and emotional appeal suddenly collapse. The rhetoric he uses in that context is essentially that if one man is a flatterer, so are they all, because every level of fortune is made easier by the level below it. This is not strong nor logical argumentation for Timon's claim (that if one man is a flatterer, so are all men). In further poor logic, he then goes on to extend man's *image* to man himself, as an entity which he disdains. His illogical rhetoric, of all men being flatterers if one is a flatterer, is mixed with his act of directing perceptions and concerns towards mere superficial appearances. Timon does this in such a way as to obscure reality. (4.3.3 – 22)

In Plato's philosophy, physical objects change, but essence, or true existence, is

unchanging. The physical world contains changing objects. It is transient, and is perceived with the senses. Timon focuses on transient, superficial, physical reality, which is less real than true existence.

Superficial Appearances in Relation to the Eye and Strength of Observation

In the words of Ulysses “The present eye praises the present object.” (*Troilus* 3.3.182) The word “present” positions the object, together with the eye which sees it, in the changing present. Therefore they can function in a way which contrasts with true existence, because true existence does not change. Appearances, such as the object which the eye sees, are linked to changing, transient realities, and they contrast with true existence.

Contrasting with the protagonist is Flavius, who, in his characterization, is consistently depicted as reliable and honest, and who has far more depth in his observation than Timon. He shows an understanding of superficial appearances and says that Timon's magnificence was merely painted. The thin surface-level reality of paint is then tied to Timon's false friends, who Flavius compares to varnish. (4.2.39) The painted quality of Timon's former greatness also poetically matches the portrait of Timon made by the Painter at the opening of the play. Even if the Poet and Painter are mere flatterers, their speech and activity in the opening poetically set up the central thematic issues of the play. The painting is said to teach nature what it should be like (Bate 1750), and in that context, the eye in Timon's portrait is said to emanate an impressive mental power. The portrait of Timon, which is of course linked to the Painter's ideas, outdoes Timon's flawed actions and observations. It shows the type of eye, implying observation, which Timon lacks. (1.1.34 – 47) Timon allows his eyes to become tricked by superficial, changing, transient appearances, appearances which are worldly. These appearances are unlike true existence or essences, which Plato says are perceived with the mind. The concept of appearances is also depicted when the Poet says that, in his poem, a person with Lord Timon's *appearance*, once favored, is then rejected by Fortune, and his dependents “let him fly down.” (1.1.74 – 102). (The Poet uses the word “frame”.

“Frame” means “disposition or appearance”. Bate, footnote on page 1751) Thus Timon's mere transitory appearance is subject to change. Timon's dependents, also judging on the basis of transient, superficial appearances, allow the protagonist to fall.

Plato, Cupid, and the Sonnets

Cupid tells Timon that “The five best senses / Acknowledge thee their patron.” and a feast for the eyes is presented. (1.2.106 – 110) Cupid links the five senses, including that of sight, or the eye, to Timon's plenteous bosom, meaning Timon's generous heart (Bate 1758). One is reminded of Sonnet 24, in which the image which appears to the eye is first linked to, then distinguished from, the heart. In *Timon*, the eye is first connected to the heart in Cupid's words. Later it is distinguished from the heart, as what has passed for views of reality, expressed by Timon, the Poet, the Painter, Apemantus, and others, is shown to be unreliable.

Like *Timon* and other Shakespearean plays (such as *Lear* and *Troilus and Cressida*), as well as the *Timon* comedy, Sonnet 24 makes prominent use of the word “eye”. The eye functions in the poem as a painter, the beauty of the person addressed is portrayed in the speaker's heart. Along with the first mentioning of the heart, the portrayed beauty is held in the frame of the speaker's body. (According to Bate, p. 2439, it is the frame of the picture, but also plays on the sense of “body”, and, in the poem, the word “body” is said to be the frame.) Yet the stability and strength of the reality depicted in the first lines of the poem is potentially undermined in the following line, in which the painter's best art is perspective, which in Shakespeare's time could mean “a type of painting in which the image appeared distorted (or different) until it was viewed from a particular angle.” (Bate 2439) In other words, anamorphic visual art is invoked.

Anamorphic paintings change in significant ways when they are viewed from different angles, revealing features which are unclear when the painting is viewed from a normal perspective. Through this technique a painting may provide additional “commentary” on its primary depiction, provided that one looks at the work from an unusual vantage

point, and sees things out of a normal context; and for this to occur, the painter needs to present the image out of a normal context. “Defamiliarization” means “presenting things out of a normal context, or in unusual ways, in art”. It is a technique espoused by Victor Shklovsky. (Shklovsky 24) Timon's characterization generally presents him out of a normal context *in terms of the play's mimesis*. However the play as a whole may itself be viewed from alternative, almost anamorphic perspectives, if we approach with varying points of view. While this can be said about many artistic works, *Timon* is especially sensitive to this approach. The play's economic depiction is what we see when looking directly at the “canvas” of the work, while other themes and depictions rise powerfully to the surface when the play is seen from particular perspectives.

A well-know example of the method of anamorphic depiction, which probably would have been familiar to Shakespeare, is an anamorphic picture by William Scrots. Another painting which may have been familiar Shakespeare is Holbein the Younger's famous work *The Ambassadors*, in which, what appears as strange blur at the bottom, seeming to be a cloth of some kind, is revealed to be a human skull when viewed from the correct angle. Scrots' work was displayed in Whitehall, where there is a good chance Shakespeare saw it, and Holbein's work is believe to have been in Whitehall during this period. Such anamorphic work is sometimes discussed in relation to *Richard II*, as well as later plays written around the time of *Timon*, which some critics claim to be influenced by mannerism. “In the Holbein painting [...] an impressive double portrait [...], the achievements of the Renaissance in its practical aspects are magnificently expressed [...]” The two men are portrayed in a manner linked to the accomplishments of courtiers. The strange skull which appears at the bottom of the painting, when it is viewed from the correct angle, is partly a pun on the artist's name, and is also believed to be a contrast to the splendor of the main scene, providing a reminder of the transience of human glory. (Roston *Renaissance Perspectives in Literature and the Visual Arts* 254)

In addition to anamorphic technique, the mannerist movement of the late Renaissance has been linked to Shakespeare's writing. Regarding *Timon*, Nuttall writes “Cyrus Hoy was right to link this play especially to the alienation technique of 'mannerist' art, in

which 'violent' perspective effects and distortions of the human body even as they shock us remind us that we are looking at *pictures*." This points toward the earlier discussion, by the Poet and Painter, of art about art. Whether or not one categorizes *Timon* as a mannerist work, the criteria for labeling a work as mannerist provides useful concepts for analyzing *Timon*'s themes. Features of *Timon*, and other plays by Shakespeare, sometimes linked to mannerism, include the portrayal of worldly realities in a distorted or disturbed manner, as well as "the ambivalences [...] tensions" portrayed in these dramas." (Roston 240 – 2)

Shakespeare's invoking anamorphic art invites the audience to look at the play from different perspectives. For example in *Richard II*, it has been said that anamorphic art is a key to the play as a whole revealing "a duality of viewpoint which allows the developing plot to be interpreted at any moment from two different [...] angles [each of which is valid]." (Roston 256) In the case of *Richard II*, his practical leadership, seen from the mundane, political view, is inadequate to justify his claim to power, yet his more heavenly divine right provides him with rightful authority. The play connects with both modes of interpretation. In *Timon*, both transient economic issues and transcendental vision are offered. Though there is no direct mention in *Timon* of anamorphic art, the extensive discussion of the Poet and Painter at the opening, and significant use of the word "interpretation" provide ample incentive to pay attention to varying "angles of perspective" for viewing the play and its protagonist.

In Sonnet 24, the painter is portrayed as producing anamorphic art, art which tricks the viewer and hides aspects of reality in the painting. The eye is put in the role of a painter at the outset of the poem, and this eye is linked to the body by portraying beauty's form in the body. The poem strongly suggests that the eye of the body tricks the viewer. The senses of the body perceive things which change. Only the mind can perceive things which do not change, which are essences of things (including the essence of beauty), and which Plato connects with true existence.

In Sonnet 24, the painter using the technique of perspective is potentially deceptive, especially if one does not view the painting from the correct angle. This may serve as an

allegory for interpretation, for example regarding one's way of approaching an artistic work. Lines five and six of the sonnet may further dismantle the initial view of physical, surface-level beauty, since through the painter's skill, one may find where one's "true image pictured lies", potentially undermining if one assigns a double meaning to the word "lies". In other words, the *image, when pictured*, when given or shown in a picture, lies or deceives. There is then a distancing in the sonnet from the earlier celebration of eyes which frame of the picture in the heart of the *body* in line three. The two concluding lines are "Yet eyes this cunning want to grace their art: / They draw but what they see, know not the heart." "This cunning want" means "lack this skill" (Bate 2439), so that eyes are depicted in the poem as lacking the skill of knowing the heart, only of drawing what they see, which may easily be linked to mere surface-level images or beauty.

Timon generally fails to express his knowledge of the heart. Instead, he uses his senses to focus on superficial appearances.

In the Sonnet 24's differentiation between the eye of the body and the heart, there are strong similarities with Plato. Plato distinguishes between the perceptions of physical senses (which include the eyes) and the knowledge of the mind. Subjects similar to those of Sonnet 24, connected with the eye and heart, deceptive appearances, true image, etc., are expressed elsewhere in Shakespeare's verse (for example in sonnets 46, 47, 69 104, 106, 113, 114, 121, and 127).

Phaedo had not yet been translated to English when *Timon* was written. (Miola 173, Ed. Kastan) If Shakespeare only mastered minor skills in Greek, as Ben Jonson implied, then he might not have read this book in its original language. It is possible he might have read it in Greek if he spoke more of the language than Jonson implied. He might have read excerpts from Plato's books, or someone might have translated passages for him. He might have been exposed to Plato's works or ideas through his learned contacts in academia, including Jonson, with whom he collaborated professionally.

Shakespeare's use of ideas similar to the ones presented in Plato's writing is not

contingent upon him reading them directly. “[... Humanists wrote works] based largely on classical writers such as Aristotle, Plato, and above all , Cicero.” (Abrams 144) Among a number of possibilities is this one: if Shakespeare did not read Plato's book directly, he may well have been familiar with Cicero's ideas, and, through these, acquired Platonic ideas which influenced his plays. “[T]raining in rhetoric was a central part of Shakespeare's and his contemporaries' educational program. [...] English humanists had a scheme for education [...]” (Platt “Shakespeare and Rhetorical Culture.” 279 –280) The Roman writers Cicero and Quintilian shaped the humanist educational program (Platt 282); and in Elizabethan grammar school students studied Cicero. (Miola 200, Ed. Hattaway) Therefore it is likely that Shakespeare, through his grammar school education and the humanist educational program, would have been familiar with Cicero. Shakespeare's forwarding of the humanist influences of his early education provides an example of L. G. Salingar's statement “The theatre was the point of closest contact between humanism and popular taste.” (Salingar 54)

With regard to Plato, Cicero stated he both departed from, as well as had a debt to Plato. Cicero was in agreement with Plato in terms of recognizing the fallibility of sensory perception. (Platt 286) This subject, of surface-level reality by which the senses of the body might be tricked, may have come from a number of sources, and it is found repeatedly in Shakespeare's canon.

Philip Davis discusses Plato in relation to Victorian literature, but in this context his points may also be applied to the writing of Shakespeare and Renaissance England. He says that, in using these ideas of Plato in literature, one goes beyond the everyday experience of reality, and sees the prior and underlying nature of reality itself. (Davis *The Victorians*, Vol. 8 1830 –1880 of *The Oxford English Literary History* 285) There are Shakespearean passages which resonate with Platonic influence, including one of the central themes in *Timon* – the reality that underlies appearance. The discussion by the Poet and Painter at the opening directly involve Platonic thought, including the concept of the reality that underlies appearance.

“The dialogue between Poet and Painter with which the work opens is based on the *paragone* of Renaissance Italy. [...] The “paragone” was]

a formalized controversy about the status of the painter in society, especially in relation to that of the poet. The arguments in favor of giving the painter higher status depended largely upon the neo-Platonic view, first expressed in this connection by Leonardo da Vinci, that sight is the supreme sense, and that the painter's blend of science and imagination gives a truer rendering than poetry of the reality that underlies appearance. Shakespeare gives a sample of the conventional arguments, and the Painter's portrait of Timon is valued because it represents better than nature itself can his true magnanimity. [...] Timon shows how the arguments of the paragone relate to the themes of the play when (I.i.156 –60) he endorses the view that painting represents not the false outside of a man, but his true nature. We should remember that the motives of the Painter and the Poet are just as corrupt as those of the other attendants; and the full relevance of the opening scene is not understood until they make their appearance in the second half of the play, when Timon is rumored to be rich again. Then he can use the language of art criticism ironically, implying that what the Painter draws is “counterfeit” not in the innocent technical usage, but in the moral sense; as to the Poet, he is, as Plato first remarked, a liar by trade. Despite their claims to insight they are all “outside”; he, stripped of the outward trappings of magnanimity, is a misanthrope. [...] We learn early that Timon's generosity is based upon a false estimate of his own nature, and of his followers. He is unaware that he is buying love and admiration. [... He is deceived] by appearance [...]. [...] And] Apemantus, who indicates a brute reality under the fair seeming, is no more intended to propose a totally acceptable point of view than his counterpart Thersites in *Troilus and Cressida*.” (Kermode 1442, 1443)

The familiarity, in Shakespeare's milieu, of such issues as appearance, image, and related subject matter in the visual arts, is shown in the poem by Ben Jonson addressed to the reader, printed by the title page in the first folio of Shakespeare's works. The poem concerns Shakespeare's portrait on the title page, and Jonson urges “reader, look / Not on his picture, but his book.” Whether one, in interpreting *Timon*, takes the view of Neo-Platonism as expresses in the above quote (including the belief “that sight is the supreme sense”), or the Platonic view expressed in the book *Phaedo*, a significant thematic subject of the play will be the reality that underlies appearance. Either basis for interpretation may be linked to the contrast between appearances and reality.

It is plausible that Shakespeare, when he presents the senses in *Timon*, communicates ideas based upon Plato, especially when one looks at iterative renderings of this theme in his cannon, such as Sonnet 24, in which the image which appears to the eye is first

linked to, then distinguished from, the heart. In Sonnet 69, “Those parts of thee that the world's eye doth view [...] By seeing farther than the eye hath shown. / They look into the beauty of thy mind.”, is especially reminiscent of *Phaedo*. The parts of the person which are viewed by the world are the outer appearances of the physical manifestations of the person (such as the body or physical things associated with the person). The fact that the world does the viewing not only implies the large number of lookers, but also may potentially be associated with entities connected with the physical world, as opposed to, and inferior to, essence or truth. The sonnet encourages looking further than the eye to see the beauty of the mind. In Platonic thought, the idea, essence or true existence of beauty is something one can only perceive with the mind. And, similarly to the narrative pattern found in *Timon*, Sonnet 69 expresses outward praise linked to outward appearance, yet this outward praise is portrayed in the sonnet as transient, and subject to change, much like the superficial images and words of the flatterers (as opposed to the essence of things, which according to Plato is not subject to change).

To reiterate, when Cupid address Timon, he says “The five best senses / Acknowledge thee their patron.” (1.2.106 – 110) Those five senses, including that of sight, acknowledge Timon as their patron in the context of the odious circumstances presented at that point in the drama, of a hidden falseness of friendship surrounding Timon. All five senses are patronized by a character who himself is to some extent blind, in that he does not fully see, regarding the truth of his situation. When a feast for the eyes is presented, it is superficially transient and deceptive.

Shakespeare's depiction of the thematic subjects of deceived senses versus actuality, the eye or surface appearances and the heart, etc. occur frequently in his cannon. As Tom McAlindon points out, Hal, when he says “[...] I will deeply put the fashion on / And wear it in my heart [...]” (5.2.53 – 4 *Henry IV* Part Two), means his outward signs of emotion will match his inner emotion. (McAlindon 132 – 3) Similar to depictions of the fallibility of the senses are depictions of outward show which deceives. An example of this is Bassanio's speech in *The Merchant of Venice* denouncing “outward shows” while observing that “the world is still deceiv'd with ornament” (III.ii.73, 74) “The speech seems to be a straightforwardly anti-ornamental, anti-rhetorical one, firmly in the

tradition of Plato rather than of Cicero.” (Platt 291 – 292)

We now return to *Timon*, by way of *The Tragedy of Troilus and Cressida*. In the words of Cressida, “Troilus farewell! One eye yet looks on thee, / But with my heart the other eye doth see. [...] This fault in us I find / The error of our eye directs our mind: / What error leads must err. O, then conclude / Minds swayed by eyes are full of turpitude.” (5.2.122 – 127) (“turpitude” means “wickedness”) This again resembles Plato's ideas. It also sounds like the kind of advice Timon could have used, had he been a real person.

This does not mean that the sense of sight is bad or unreliable, but that one should not be tricked by mere superficial appearances. The above quotes provide examples, in other Shakespearean plays, of issues related to Timon's fault of often only looking at the surface level image, or of failing to properly differentiate between the superficial, transient reality and deeper truths.

“[... Alcibiades'] anger against Athens, unlike Timon's hatred of mankind, is neither implacable nor indiscriminating.” (Hibbard 13) Unlike Timon, Alcibiades shows the ability to differentiate and not overly generalize, and to better distinguish between the individuals who have wronged him, and those who have not done so. He also is used to portray the self-control or reason which prevents him from descending into the extremism and generalization portrayed through Timon, who succumbs to negativity and uncontrolled choler throughout most of the play.

Timon extends his hate of the superficial image of man, to man himself, blending the superficial image with the deeper personality. His focusing upon unreliable outer appearances rather than the reality of inner feelings, and his poor observation (concerning his finances and as well as socially) is shown consistently in the rendering of his characterization. After he has been betrayed by outer appearances he simply continues his pattern, of lack of reason to understand and master the situations which appear before his eyes. The flatterers are human, and anything else which has the same likeness (as a human) is considered bad, without any attempt shown by Timon to find out about the inner thoughts and feelings of persons on an individual basis (with the

brief and temporary exception of Flavius when he cries). Such a contrast between outer image and inner feelings is expressed in Sonnet 46 “mine eye's due is thy outward part, / And my heart's right thy inward love of heart.” Timon is generally portrayed as contacting other people with his eyes but not his heart.

Timon overcompensates for his previous error of being vulnerable to the superficial comfort of the flatterers by not trusting or liking anyone. He fails to develop as an observer and judge of men. This is because he continues to repeat the same mistake of superficiality as he did before, though now only seeing the appearance of bad where there is or might be good, while before he only saw the appearance of good where there was actually bad. The play asks questions about appearances. The problem explored in the play is not of Timon seeing too much, but of him seeing too little.

Returning to elemental depiction, when Timon speaks to manifestations of the elements just before meeting Apemantus, in addressing the earth, he invokes the adder and creatures of the earth believed to be poisonous in Shakespeare's time. (Hibbard 224) He speaks in a manner closely resembling King Richard's words to the land (which represents the element of earth), after Richard has returned from Ireland (*Richard II* 3.2.4 – 26). While Richard requests earth to hinder only his political enemies, Timon implies a relationship between these creatures and man generally. This highlights a significant difference in the characterization of Richard and Timon. Richard differentiates between his actual enemies and the rest of mankind, but Timon fails to do this. Richard gains the support of the audience, and rises as he falls through poetry. Timon fails to properly observe and differentiate, generalizes, and simply falls with the false rhetoric of nihilism, which may be linked to his failures of observation and judgment.

The tears of Flavius are the brief exception, in relation to Timon's characterization, because they allow Timon a glimpse into deeper thoughts and feelings. It is no coincidence that Alcibiades, who is in certain ways the antithesis of Timon, invokes the image of a sea of tears when he shows his contrasting mercy and compassion, opposing the anger which has been prevalent throughout most of the drama. Tears in the play

direct increased attention to inner feelings and the greater truth.

Misled Perceptions and False Mirrors

Structure may be linked to theme, and an author's choices of narrative strategy may reveal particular thematic constituents. In this play are structural features linked to themes of tricked perception, false appearances, and interpretation of reality.

In confusing mere outer appearances with deeper realities, Timon continues to make the same error that he did in Athens, that of believing the superficial displays of his false friends. In the wilderness he views all men as bad, thus even the good are looked upon as bad, whereas in Athens he viewed bad men – his flatterers – as good. Though the viewpoints are opposed, the thinking from which those viewpoints are formed is the same; it is the error of inaccurate interpretation of outer appearances. This flaw in Timon is connected with the thematic subject of outer appearance versus deeper reality or truths, and is an important part of his characterization and the themes of the play.

The inverse images of bad men seen as good, and good men seen as bad, is reflected in the large-scale structure of the play, which is, in telling ways, like a mirror. Examples of this include the play's wax-sea images at both the beginning and end; Timon calling Apemantus proud early in the play, and Apemantus asking if Timon is still proud during their final meeting; Timon's tears and those of Flavius early in the play, and the tears of Flavius, and Neptune, late in the play. Timon's homes in Athens and the wilderness give images of culture and nature, opulence and destitution, inverted like images in a mirror, in which Timon continues to interact with Athenian society as a source of gold, and yet with a complete reversal of attitude.

In the opening section of the play, the flatterers are described as “glass-faced”. (1.1.68) “Glass” means “mirror” in this context (Bate 1751). The flatterers are eager to present a mirror to those they flatter which shows the flattered person's face instead of their own. The play not only depicts these mirror-faced flatterers, its structure is presented in the form of a mirror, with important features at the play's opening corresponding to

important features at its close. This aspect of the play's structure is linked to other themes as well, such as interpretation, which is a subject related to perception.

Interpretation as a Thematic Constituent

There are thematic issues in the play, related to appearances and actuality, regarding how reality is interpreted. The subject of interpretation is related to the subject of observation and appearances. We can interpret things which we see. As previously stated, a property of *Timon* is that it is formed like a mirror. Along with the play's structural mirror are thematic issues. The Poet says that one might interpret Timon's silent gesture in the painting at the beginning (1.1.42), much as the silent wax casting of his Tomb is interpreted by Alcibiades at the end (and in this section the word “interpretation” is directly used). (5.3.8 and 5.4.79 – 91)

In the quarto version of *Troilus and Cressida*, there is a description of the eye which, though it sees, does not see itself. (3.3.108, Bate 1534) The eye which does not see itself is easy to associate with *Timon* and the play's themes pertaining to interpretation. The structure of *Timon*, related to the theme of interpretation, is like holding up a mirror to its own version of that eye referred to in *Troilus*. In the examples given above, of depictions of eyes, appearances, etc., Flavius and Timon interpret their environment differently, Flavius discerning false surface display from more honest realities (4.2.36 – 39), and Timon continuing to extend mere images or appearances of men to the men themselves (4.3.21 – 2). We are presented with a play in which the eyes of Flavius and Timon are used in very different ways.

In *Timon*, interpretation of the environment affects the theatrical environment itself. In the world of the drama, by means of Timon's characterization, the reality of the countryside is interpreted almost as an metropolitan space, where Athens and human society continue to be present. Although Timon retreats from civilization and his fellow man to nature, he continually complains about issues in relation to his fellow man. Thus he never really leaves society and civilization in the world of his thoughts, and in the physical world he continues to be a magnet for society which seeks him, as it did when

he prospered in Athens, in the form a series of encounters in the wilderness. The audience is continually reminded of mankind and urban society, even in a natural setting.

Circularity, and Its Relation to Theme

Frank Kermode says of *Timon*, that the play is “schematic to an unusual degree”. (Kermode 1442) G. R. Hibbard also gives a similar description of the drama. (Hibbard 9, 10) Included in this schematic arrangement are prominent signs of circularity. (“circularity” : “the depiction of something at the end of a narrative which repeats or resembles a depiction at the beginning of the same narrative; it can function as a signal of closure in that narrative”) As stated previously, the play's imagery and dialog sometimes display a mirror-like symmetry in the opening and closing sections. These signs of circularity and their relation to themes of the drama will be further delineated in this chapter.

For example, as touched upon earlier, when Apemantus and Timon first meet in the play, Timon tells Apemantus “”Thou art proud” (1.1.191), and in their final meeting, Apemantus reverses the statement by asking Timon “Art thou proud yet?” (4.3.276) The dialogue of these characters is presented in the narrative with mirror-like reverse-symmetry

“[...T]he return of the Poet and the Painter [... serves] to bring the play back to its beginning, thus suggesting that the final phase is near [...]”. (Hibbard 238). The reappearance of these two characters, presented at the opening, then returning towards the conclusion of the play, serves to enhance the drama's circularity (Kermode 1443), which is so central to its poetics.

Thematically Relevant Circularity is Further Shown in Elemental Patterns

There are, in addition, other forms of circularity in the cosmic imagery: certain

elemental concepts are invoked in the opening which functions as pre-echoes, preparing the audience or reader for the “other side” of the play at the conclusion. The Poet describes poesy in terms of fire, stating that the fire in the flint does not appear until it is struck; but concerning the flame of poetry he says “our gentle flame / Provokes itself and like the current flies” (1.1.28 – 31) A clear contrast is affirmed between two fire images. The first emerges from the violence of striking a stone, and is linked to the element of earth, with its stone association. The second is the gentle flame of poets which is linked to the element of water through the word “current”. Soon after, poetry is again linked to water with the sea image (together with wax). The contrasting images of earth, in the form of flint, and water, is returned to when Timon compares mankind to flint, opposed to the water image of tears displayed by Flavius. (4.3.488 –489) This is a significant point in the action and dialog of the play, which stands out because it is the one moment in which Timon comes, however briefly, to showing he understands deep inner feelings and individuality. (4.3.500 – 501)

The motif-pattern of earth and fire associated with violence invites comparison with the portrayal of Timon, who is a source of gold (a blend of fire and earth), and who has excess choler (fire) and who throws stones (earth).

We are thus provided, in the early structure of *Timon*, with two clusters of images. One set consists of elemental water images such as current and sea, together with the *soft* substance of wax, these being associated with gentleness, poetry, and a lack of harshness. The fire of this group of images is a gentle flame, one that is perhaps “tamed”, balanced, or tempered by water, or one which is controlled by virtue. The other cluster of images, as shown in the opening section, are those of earth in the form of the flint which is struck, and a type of fire which shows when struck, implying violence. Timon's stone tomb is thematically linked with the harsh struck flint, but the hardness of the stone of his tomb yields to a series of softer, gentler images. A pattern of motifs is established, which emerge at the opening and conclusion in the circularity of the play. This pattern involves the wax-sea images, and the transition from stone (of Timon's tomb) to gentler wax and water images, upon which Nuttall elaborates. The wax-sea water images and increasing gentility of which Nuttall speaks are both opposed

to the harshness, anger and invective which have been dominant throughout most of the play, and are linked, in the motif cluster, to gentle poetry. Poetry is described by the Poet at the opening, and at the conclusion poetry is displayed in the transforming interpretation of Timon and his tomb by Alcibiades.

The elemental images of fire and water also play out in the course of events of the drama, fire being linked to the choler of anger seen throughout most of the play, and water, in the form of tears, opposing it. The anger of the fire is linked to the hardness of stone, both in the fire-flint image at the opening, and the stone tomb of the angry protagonist. The stone of the tomb and its harsh epitaph are “loosened” into gentler, yielding images, such as wax and watery tears, as the violence and treachery of the play abate; and the water image of tears effectively dowses the fire of excessive choler, bringing the drama to a state of equilibrium, and a calm balance of honesty which has been absent nearly throughout the entirety of the drama.

The play concludes with a sea of tears, privileging the element of water, which would normally be an element of lower altitude and a corresponding lower, less noble status. When the Poet first mentioned the corresponding sea-wax juxtaposition, he did so in connection with the eagle's flight of his poetry, so that, in accordance with the image, the eagle's flight is in the sea. One may make the case that the eagle's flight at the opening, which is in the sea (the sea of wax in the Poet's speech) instead of the air where it would normally be, is a pre-echo to the corresponding wax-sea image at the conclusion, lifting the element of water to an altitude normally connected with the element of air. The fact that the air-water elemental combination is privileged over the earth-fire of choler and hardness, brings us once more to gold, for the latter element-pair has reverberations with the elemental make-up of gold, earth and fire. Thus the way in which the poetic commentary of elemental imagery plays out and culminates had a dual thematic function. One, related to economics, is of transcending gold. The other is the emotional transcendence, the equilibrium of balancing tears which dowses the fire of excess choler, as well as the look behind the mask of appearances, revealing honest feelings.

The link between the honesty and the water of tears in the elemental imagery is implied in the play's poetry when Apemantus calls water "honest". (1.2.59) Linking water to honesty, can poetically imply that its opposite fire, or at least excess fire, is dishonest. The excess choler is thus poetically linked to dishonesty, the opposing water image to honesty, also relating to the play's themes of deceiving appearances and actuality.

Flavius sums up one of the play's most thematically important air images, including the air of words, and also the transitory nature of both words and Timon's worldly status, when he says "[...] the world is but a word: / Were it all yours to give in a breath [...]." (2.2.153 –5) When he says that the world Timon would get with a mere word would quickly be gone, he brings up a central theme in the work, which relates to the *transitory* nature of Timon's worldly, physical wealth.

Transcending the materialism of physical objects, and emotional transcendence, are thematically central in the play, and can function in a manner which corresponds to Plato's philosophy, discussed above.

No single set of themes can be said to be overarching, The economic themes, whether shown in the frequent use of the word gold, or depiction of usury, remain strong in *Timon*. The other themes constitute subtle yet powerful depth in one of Shakespeare's most overlooked works.

The tears of Flavius give Timon a glimpse behind the superficial mask of mundane yet cutthroat economic affairs. It is a softening glimpse beyond a hard world of treason, greed, and unfriendliness upon which Timon has focused, through the majority of the drama. While it is not enough of a glimpse to lead to a deep and lasting epiphany for the protagonist, it is a pre-echo which sets up the culmination of the play; in which harsh solidities of stone yield to increasing gentility of wax and water, and the sea is transformed, by means of Alcibiades' interpretation, to the tears of a god. This group of elemental and poetic images indicate themes of the play which transcend worldly matters.

Nuttall on *Timon's* Circularity, and Further Links to Interpretation

In his eloquent discussion concerning ecphrasis in *Timon*, A. D. Nuttall links ecphrasis to a sign of circularity. Nuttall, referring to the close of *Timon of Athens*, states “It is as if Timon, as he withdraws from all human conversation, is translated into the public, verbal record of himself; he who was never a man becomes his own unnatural epitaph. [...] Timon becomes mere letters on a stone or a page. We end as we began, with *reading*.” (Nuttall 138) In addition, this text-related sign of circularity is emphasized through the combined depiction of text with visual art. The act of reading at the conclusion shares the spotlight with the tomb, which can also function as a form of visual art similar to sculpture, and therefore might be said to correspond with the emphasis on the visual art of painting at the start of the play. The tomb image is like a sculpture which makes an artistic statement with its placement on the border of land and sea, recognized by Alcibiades when he says that Timon, through the rich use of his imagination has made vast Neptune weep upon his grave. At the close, the tomb, as visual art, is combined with the writing of the epitaph, much as the visual art of painting shares the spotlight with writing poetry at the opening.

Nuttall's focus upon words (“We end as we began, with *reading*.”), and upon Timon as a persona spoken of in his absence – as opposed to a character who directly represents himself – is of value in the play's analysis, and invites further discussion which is capable of revealing important dimensions in the work.

One of the most prominent signs of circularity in the play is the combination of wax and sea images (referred to earlier in this thesis), when the words “wax” and “sea” are juxtaposed, both in the opening section at 1.1.56, and in the closing section at 5.4.76 – 78, along with the image of Neptune weeping at 5.4.88. The first instance is when the Poet says his poetic flow (Bate 1750) “moves itself / In a wide sea of wax.” (1.1.56) In this context, “wax” may refer to the wax of a wax writing-tablet “on which the Poet writes his verse, [...] frequently linked to the action at the end of the play when Timon's epitaph is copied by [...] a soldier onto [...] wax.” (Dawson, Minton 164)

According to Nuttall's statements "We end as we began, with *reading*", both the beginning and ending of the play should significantly display the act of reading. The act of reading, as Nuttall states in relation to *Timon*, is strongly emphasized at the conclusion of the play, yet we do not in fact end where we began, with reading, in terms of what is presented by the drama. For while a character, Alcibiades, does actually read a text as an important element of the closing section of *Timon*, this is not in fact the case in its initial phase, in which little or no reading is actually done or even discussed by the characters, though the process of *writing* does come centrally into the picture. One may argue that the poet, in discussing the act of creating poetic writing, implies the act of reading indirectly, for it is not risky to assume that poems are created as works intended to be read, yet the precise distinction between reading and writing yields profitable analysis. Also the two wax images which frame the work at the open and close are both connected with text, the poet's wax is possibly wax upon which notes may be written, and the wax at the conclusion is also a medium for bearing textual information. Yet rather than an act of reading, the opening actually consists of a conversation, in terms of the activities and dialog presented onstage. Therefore some adjustment in delineation is beneficial in describing the play's circularity.

A productive pattern of analysis emerges if one slightly shifts Nuttall's sign of circularity in the play, *reading* (at the opening and close) to *interpretation*. (It is possible that Nuttall uses the word "reading" with the meaning "interpretation", which is one of the word's definitions, yet he seems in his discourse to use the word "reading" with its most common meaning. In any case, if he means interpretation when he uses the word "reading" on page 138 of his book, it is not made clear.) The concept of interpretation covers both the opening and close of the work more thoroughly and with greater precision (than reading), thus better describing its circularity. And more importantly, it has further consequences of significance for the play's thematic analysis, as interpretation is one of the most important features in the play's set of themes, and is related to the themes of appearances and reality discussed earlier in this chapter.

This is supported by the fact that the poetry as well as the painting discussed at the outset are especially interpretive in nature, in that they convey the ideas about Timon

which the Poet and Painter have construed,. The poet, describing the portrait in the opening, states “One might interpret.” (1.1.34, 35) of the unspeaking image.

The focus of the play at the beginning and end is upon construing, primarily of an absent protagonist. He is not present speak for himself, but is instead spoken about and interpreted by others. The act of interpreting and discussing the protagonist in his absence is also prominent in other sections of the play, for example when the strangers and Lucius discuss Timon, as well as the scene depicting Timon's servants after their master has left Athens.

The Painter and Poet exchange their viewpoints, and how they construe Timon and his effects on the world. They present a lofty figure, perhaps vulnerable to changes of fortune and false friends. Timon is constructed for the audience, at first, through their construing and describing Timon and his actions. The basis of their description of Timon is soon transformed from a description of facts to a point of dispute, when their interpretation is challenged and dismantled by Apemantus. Apemantus gives an opposing interpretation of both Timon and his entourage which severely undermines the earlier one. Apemantus's approach to Timon is even seen in his use of pronouns: While Alcibiades addresses Timon as “you” (1.2.71), the pronoun used when speaking to those with high social rank, Apemantus addresses Timon as “thou” from the start (1.1.207), the pronoun used for addressing a person who lacks high social rank. (Crystal *Think on My Words: Exploring Shakespeare's Language* 193 – 5) The act of construing Timon, by other characters, occurs throughout much of the opening and closing portions of the play.

Dissolving the Harshness of Timon's World

We are presented with two texts when we read the epitaph. Might the two texts of the epitaph be able to function as a microcosm of the larger play as a whole, itself presenting the reader with two contrasting texts, each depending upon different angles of perspective? In a way, the two sections of the epitaph seem to be a miniature version of the larger mirror-structure of the play, their clashing texts like the distorted mirror of

Timon's world, which is portrayed in much of the drama.

The epitaph consists of two conflicting sections, one requesting the reader to “Seek not my name” and another freely offering Timon's name. (5.4.81 – 82) Some believe this feature to be a remnant of a rough version of the play (which continued to be rough because it remained incomplete). “[... T]hese lines bring together two separate epitaphs in Plutarch's account of Timon; since they are contradictory, Shakespeare would certainly have deleted or revised in a final version.” (Kermode 1474) However it is possible to allow for a final version of the drama which retains the conflicting statements on Timon's epitaph. For instance the contradictions of the two sections of the epitaph may reflect those found in both the play and its protagonist. (Klein 174) These discordant requests are consistent with the discord of the play and with Timon's characterization. Alcibiades, after reading the text of the epitaph, says “These well express in thee thy latter spirits.” (5.4.74) The conflicting expression of the epitaph, with its coarseness, corresponds well to Timon's later characterization, and to the general lack of harmony depicted in most of the play. And yet this harshness in the play is largely resolved at the conclusion.

Nuttall says “The hardness of the inscription, of the stone, is played off against the softness of the wax, which receives the impression and the spray which breaks over the gravestone and in like manner the clarity of the memorial loses itself in echoes and pre-echoes.” (Nuttall 138) One might also say that while the clarity of the memorial as a stone object loses itself, another type of clarity which is stronger is gained, appearing in the metamorphosis from stone to less solid substances like wax and the spray of breaking waves, then to words and ideas, as Timon and his memorial are spoken and thought of. Images associated with Timon, after he dies, are symbolically changed from stone to things which are softer and gentler. At one point, the wax's soft impression is said to interpret. (5.4.78 – 79) This is fascinating when juxtaposed with the corresponding image at the opening, of a sea of wax, together with the gentleness of the sea of tears which the play celebrates. These features are relevant in terms of analyzing *Timon's* more transcendental themes.

The gentler things to which the stone is transformed may inspire a search for delicate, airy and ethereal images, functioning as “pre-echoes”. In interpreting these pre-echoes, one may find that a substantial portion of them are linked to the previously discussed subjects of interpretation, and the related subjects of perception, appearances, reality, truth and knowledge. Much of this can be observed in passages of *Timon* containing ecphrasis or, as Nuttall describes certain sections, conveying *atmospheres of ecphrasis*. Such sections displaying ecphrasis, or expression of a similar nature, consistently address issues of interpretation, or related issues such as perception or appearances (which at times may contrast with actuality). It is as if they are intended as devices for “stepping back from” the coarser machinery of the action, plot and narrative, and alluding to the finer, more transcendental facets of deeper themes in the work. They seem to invite one to look beyond surface appearances and transitory realities, both within and without the play, and address ideas connected with interpretation.

Art about Art and Interpretation of Interpretation

To reiterate, in *Timon*, particular passages manifest or resemble ecphrasis. They are (literary) art about art, or art depicting art. In *Timon*, these often express issues of interpretation, and thus contribute to the play's themes of interpretation. In doing this, one might say they interpret the theme of interpretation, and thus are interpretation of interpretation (as a subject).

The art-within-the-play (for example the painter's portrait and the poet's work) can function in relation to themes of interpretation which are themselves further interpreted at times by the play's characters.. Importantly, they can also function as *invitations to the audience to interpret*. This interpretation related ecphrasis occurs in the opening and closing circularity Nuttall refers to, at moments when the absent protagonist is interpreted by other characters, and with the masque and the Fool's performance.

The masque in Act I, scene 2 provides (to use Nuttall's term) an atmosphere of ecphrasis, in that the masque, as a performance, functions similarly to a play within a play (the rendering of performing art by characters *for other characters within the world of the*

play), thus art about art. This also may be said about the fool's performance (as he not only acts for the audience, but also entertains the other fictional characters). Timon in the wilderness seems at times to be *performing* ranting soliloquies for the gods. One might also say that Apemantus' prayer early in the play, has an almost exaggerated theatricality which may function like a performance for the other characters.

These atmospheres of ecphrasis in *Timon* are consistently linked to issues of interpretation, appearances, perception, etc. The discussion between the Poet and Painter is an example of this, and will be returned to in this discussion. Apemantus, in his grace, touches upon issues of appearances versus actuality, when he lists those who he wants to avoid making the mistake of trusting, because the issue of who one trusts may be connected with how one interprets their motives or situation. In doing such interpretation, one may differentiate between appearances or show, and actual intentions. Apemantus asks the gods to prevent him from being foolish enough to trust a man on his oath, a dog who *seems* (indicating appearances) to be sleeping, and his friends if he needs them (implying that they only appear to be friends, but are in fact something else). (1.2.59 – 68) When the fool lists the various types of whoremaster (“whoremaster” : “a user of prostitutes”), he describes them in terms of various *appearances*, of high ranking members of society, a lord, a lawyer, a philosopher, a knight and someone wearing good clothes (implying *outer* image). (2.2.107 – 111) By giving a list of high ranking members of society who seek the services of a sexual worker, the fool tarnishes their outer images, and undermines the surface-level appearances which give them status. In doing so, he also brings up the issue of superficial appearances versus actuality. Regarding the play's themes, it may be said that the play seems to invite the audience to look beyond mere superficial appearances.

The Play's Transforming of Appearances

The opening conversation between Poet and Painter not only deal with construing and presenting Timon and his persona, but with the act of creative interpretation and production themselves. Shakespeare goes to great lengths at the opening to provide the audience with a thorough and lengthy exposition, through two professional, artistic

interpreters – the Poet and the Painter – two image-makers. He then later “dissolves” this presentation to a significant degree by reducing the stature of the presenters’ interpretations. When the two reappear towards the close of the play, the Painter’s lack of concern for honest talk is revealed when he prefers promising to actual performance. (5.1.17 –19) In doing so, he says that promising is good, but not performing the action of promises. He implies that *eyes* of expectation are deceived, which aligns with the subject of deceived senses. Alcibiades is portrayed as using both his senses and his mind to perceive a higher degree of truth.

The Poet describes the former dependents of Timon allowing him to fall, and the Painter replies that it is good that the Poet informs Timon about this. (1.1.74 – 108) However they later do the same thing they implied should not be done, and seek Timon only because of greed. In the opening discussion between the Poet and Painter, Apemantus is said to drop down the knee before Timon (1.1.69 –72), yet the opposite is actually presented in his portrayal. Such discrepancies relate to and enhance the theme of discrepancy, between outward show or false words, and actuality. By failing to properly address their own flattery, their interpretation seems questionable as they have overlooked too central a factor (their own participation in falsehood about which they hypocritically complain). Thus their interpretation of Timon seems unreliable.

The contrasting interpretation of Timon, the one provided by Apemantus, is also “dissolved” by his own odiousness: the extremist approach of both his lifestyle and stricture against others, which make his interpretation seem too exaggerated, and therefore unreliable to an appreciable degree.

These opposing image makers and interpreters of Timon are systematically discarded along with a discarding of at least part of the superficial images and interpretations they have produced. By calling attention to the very subject of interpretation and the questioning of appearances, one may invite the audience to look at how they interpret. They may even question the interpretations or appearances of the play itself. By building up interpretation – for example that of Apemantus and the Poet and Painter – only to tear it down in the course of the play, one invites the audience to question the

very things presented to them by the characters in the play, and possibly even the play itself. One might link this to the “achievement of nothingness” which Nuttall relates to *Timon* (Nuttall 141), because what has been rendered on the stage may potentially become cancelled to a certain degree by the invitation to the audience to question.

The audience is prompted by the play to look and and form judgments as to what is and is not real, both within and without the play. Economically speaking, in Athens “Timon is the exclusive source of wealth, but his apparently limitless reserves are an illusion.” (Jowett 46) One might also wonder if transient aspects of the play, *including its economic emphasis*, are also somewhat lessened in favor of the deeper ideas and feeling which may be found below the surface or behind the mask.

The fact that the Poet and Painter are eventually shown to be so disingenuous and hypocritical as to be unreliable potentially casts doubts upon what they say, but the resulting problem posed corresponds to, and actually further emphasizes, the play's thematic portrayal of illusory or deceptive entities such as flattery, such entities presenting a discrepancy between surface appearances and deeper actualities. The flatterers present seemingly pleasant images and words to Timon, inducing him to continue his bad habits. The actual intentions under the pleasant surface masks are not seen by Timon when he is in Athens, and throughout the play he continues to observe poorly.

One of the most important instances of the transforming of appearances in the play, is found in the work's succession of images from solidity to more ethereal substances and features, as the play approaches its close. Nuttall states “[...T]he word 'wax' occurs close to the word 'sea'. In the later passage the poetry is working strongly with notions of hardness and softness, and then with formlessness. The hardness of the inscription, incised in stone, reappears in the softer medium of wax, and meanwhile the liquid sea begins to encroach upon it.” In the concluding sections of *Timon* structures, including the portrayal of hatred, are beginning be removed. (Nuttall 10)

There are alternatives to Nuttall's description of the conclusion of the play as the

achievement of nothingness, which is, in itself, too bleak an assessment. (Nuttall 141)

The various ways of interpreting *Timon* in relation to the hardness and softness described by Nuttall above, may be influenced by how one approaches the subject of decreasing solidity. Nuttall states that the decreasing solidity leads to formlessness. And at the conclusion of the play, there is less emphasis upon *physical* forms. This portrayal may function in relation to Plato's philosophy. One way of interpreting decreasing solidity in the play is that there may be the achievement of nothingness of *physical objects*, together with greater emphasis upon the achievement of what Plato calls essence, as well as ideas, represented by the transforming interpretation of Alcibiades together with other aspects of the play. There is a decreasing solidity of physical objects, including the stone image of Timon's tomb. In the poetry of the play, stone has earlier been associated with harshness. (1.1.28 – 31)

Interpretation and Ecphrasis

Nuttall states that in most powerful poetry of ecphrasis “there is a tense relation between the coldness of the work of art described and the warmth of life which exists within or beyond it. Commonly the image brightens into life in the course of the poem. [...] In *Timon* it is otherwise.” In Nuttall's interpretation of *Timon*, the image of ecphrasis never brightens, but instead the seemingly living protagonist dies into the two-dimensional world of letters. (Nuttall 139) And yet, one might describe the concluding atmosphere of ecphrasis as functioning in an opposite manner. Timon's characterization is highly two-dimensional anyway, throughout most of the play. At the conclusion of the drama we are given a portrayal of him, in his absence, which (even though it does make Timon's portrayal three-dimensional) does in fact brighten considerably. When Alcibiades expresses words of forgiveness, and poetically says that Timon has made vast Neptune weep upon his grave (5.4.88 – 89), the atmosphere of ecphrasis in Alcibiades' speech indeed causes the image of Timon, or at least the image of ecphrasis provided by his tomb, to brighten. This occurs through the act of interpretation by a character who is even labeled as an interpreter. (5.3.8)

Hibbard has commented upon the lack of depth in Timon's characterization.

[...A]lthough the play is entitled *The Life of Timon of Athens*, it is, paradoxically, the most remote from biography of all the tragedies. Shakespeare, in his work generally, has a remarkable capacity for investing his characters with a past and for giving them a background [...]. Falstaff almost seems to have the needs of his biographer in mind when he [.. speaks to] the Lord Chief Justice [... in...] (2 *Henry IV*, I.2.176 – 9). There is nothing like this in Shakespeare's treatment of Timon. We are never told how he acquired his wealth, whether by inheritance or as a reward for some kind of service, or how long he has been giving it away [...]. Even his age is left quite uncertain. He is not only a man without a family and without close personal relationships of any description, but also a man who is substantially without a past. He is, by far [...], the most generalized of all the tragic heroes. This same generalized quality is also apparent in the other characters and in the design of the play as a whole [...].” (Hibbard 9, 10)

Brooks and Warren state that character is so important to fiction that one way to approach the basic pattern of a story is to ask: “Whose story is this?”. In doing so it is often important to see whose fortune or situation is affected by the events of the narrative. (Brooks, Warren *Understanding Fiction* 171) Obviously Timon is the play's central character, but, given that he is provided with much dialog, including long rhetorical speeches, and is shown in the widely contrasting states (of opulent popularity and deprived seclusion), he remains distant, whether it is his story or not. He enters the world of the play, and functions as a character, yet remains almost an enigma, despite being a focus of public attention in Athens, and his abundant display of rhetoric and passion. It is as if he wears a mask which is left on throughout the drama, as if his constant closeness to the mechanical world of economics and conflict distances him from the audience. From the viewpoint of Plato discussed earlier, he is a character who is led astray by the senses of the body. Timon is too focused upon a constantly changing physical world, and lacks contact with profound truths.

Perhaps Timon's characterization includes his failure to properly discern man's image, as separate from a deeper view of man himself, and this factor is also extended to the protagonist's expression of himself which is presented to the audience. Timon's words and actions lack authenticity. He shares his surface image, but does not express himself at a deeper level. For all the time he has on stage, Timon remains as two-dimensional as

the Painter's portrait discussed at the opening, which the Poet said "One might interpret." (1.1.42) Returning to Nuttall's comment that Timon's image does not brighten through the portrayal of ecphrasis, one may say that Timon's image is generally not presented in the play as bright, with or without ecphrasis. And yet, Alcibiades' poetic interpretation at the conclusion, does in fact make the portrayal in the atmosphere of ecphrasis brighter, far brighter than the rest of Timon's portrayal in the play.

It might be said that the most important aspects of Timon's story, and the play as a whole, are those revealed when the protagonist is absent from the stage, and is interpreted by others, especially during the opening and closing sections. If it is Timon's story, as Brooks and Warren might assert, then it is his story as believed or explained by others. There is a minor increase in the depth of Timon's portrayal, through Alcibiades' statement that the words of Timon's epitaph express his more recent states of mind, thus separating Timon's general portrayal in the play from his past, and emphasizing that Timon has other sides. Through Alcibiades' expression, the overall experience of Timon, if not his *exact* image as a character, brightens into a depiction with a more balanced perspective, and greater honesty. The added depth to Timon's characterization at the conclusion is limited in effect, in terms of Timon's *overall* portrayal (probably due in part to the fact that it occurs in less than eight lines). However the effect of Alcibiades' words (combined with other interpretations of the absent protagonist, such as those of the Poet and Painter) allows for a far more three-dimensional perspective on the *themes* of the play, if not its two-dimensional protagonist.

In that Timon's presentation on the stage, and the interpretation of Timon by others, reveal little about Timon, *Timon* is less a detailed story about its protagonist than a series of experiences poetically expressed, inviting the audience to look at the issues of interpretation and appearances discussed earlier, possibly in relation to Plato's philosophic views, or other views, regarding appearances, tricked senses, and the mind perceiving truth.

The play concludes with Alcibiades' *transformation of the presentation* of Timon and his tomb, like viewing an anamorphic painting from a new angle. In doing so he reveals

the full meaning of the play. He does this through the act of interpreting Timon and his burial place in a new manner. It is as if Alcibiades, who has transcended war and retribution by conquering Athens mercifully, also transcends Timon and the hate which he represents. By forgiving Timon, he also invites Timon to posthumously transcend the low state of to which he has fallen. Alcibiades also seems to give an explanation, implying that Timon reached his low state as a result of scarcity of tears. (5.4.87). At least there is a connection made between privation of tears and Timon's social relationships, followed by the sea of tears resolving the emotional suffering depicted in the play.

The act of construing is requisite to the play's conclusion: Alcibiades construes Timon's epitaph and tomb. He does this act in part through interpretation of the written words of Timon's epitaph, something which he is empowered to do by means of knowledge. He understand the letters which the soldier cannot read. Knowledge gives him power to interpret and transform. He applies this power beyond mere translation of the epitaph, taking the memorial, and the play, to heights which transcend Timon's own pathetic words, as well as the interpretations previously given by the Poet, the Painter and Apemantus.

Timon is not the only Shakespearean character to be spoken of after his death, and presented in a different manner through poetic interpretation. Brooks and Warren point out that in *Antony and Cleopatra*, Cleopatra speaks of Mark Antony (*Antony and Cleopatra* 5.2.100 – 110), and converts “the defeat Antony has suffered into transcendent victory.” (Brooks, Warren *Modern Rhetoric* 251)

If it were not for Alcibiades' acts of construing and transforming, and the series of images from hard to soft – of the stone tomb to wax to a sea of tears to words and ideas, together with Alcibiades' gentle mercy when he conquers Athens, we would be left with the harsh poem of the epitaph and hard stone of the tomb, and the falseness and cruelty in the play that these poetic images echo. Instead we are offered a transcendental message. The earlier atmospheres of ecphrasis, and other portions of the play relating to interpretation, appearances and perception, are pre-echoes of the work's uplifting

culmination, and are linked to transcendental themes.

Conclusion

Alcibiades is able to approach Timon's tomb with the correct “keys” of knowledge to “unlock” and reveal its poetic meaning, leading to an interpretation which shifts the perspective outward to a larger context. Alcibiades describes Timon's epitaph as an expression of Timon's more recent disposition, which implies a contrast to Timon's earlier attitudes, which were perhaps worthier. Alcibiades interprets further, and doing so, continues to “zoom out” to behold the larger panorama – of vast Neptune, faults forgiven, and of peace, drastically transforming the way in which Timon's memorial, and the play as a whole, function.

Alcibiades might be looked upon as a Platonic hero, in that he uses the mind, instead of the senses of the body alone, to perceive Timon's tomb and epitaph. He uses his knowledge to understand and interpret the text he sees from Timon's epitaph, including its relationship to Timon's life, and from this perception of his senses together with the use of his mind, he provides an honest interpretation of Timon. Alcibiades transcends the transient worldly falsehood which has been prominent prior to the conclusion of the play.

Brooks and Warren describe theme in the following manner: “The theme is what is made of the topic. It is the comment on the topic that is implied in the process of the story.” (Brooks, Warren *Understanding Fiction* 272) The topics of *Timon* include portrayals of economics and friendship, both false and authentic. What we see, and how we interpret what we see, are also among the principal subjects of this play.

Superficially directing perceptions toward outer appearances, rather than looking closer or more deeply, is what causes Timon to fall. In the play, the outer appearance of a person is shown as less important than his or her ideas and deeds. The play may be interpreted as encouraging a closer look at people than merely their outer images. One is encouraged to look in a meaningful way, instead of superficially, at other people, and at one's environment. The play may be said to encourage one to look beyond worldly mechanical environments of economics and superficial masks, to greater truths.

The thesis question, “In what ways are the centrality of economic themes supported, or challenged, by this play, its imagery, and its historical context?” has been explored, and both economic and alternative ideas were found to be supported as central themes in the play. In the early sections of this thesis, imagery and historical context were discussed, chiefly in relation to economic portrayal. Not surprisingly, given most prominent commentary on the work, economic aspects of *Timon* were found to be significant. Money and economics are often depicted satirically or otherwise critically, in the work, and yet money is also shown to be a reward for virtue, when Timon gives gold to Flavius and he accepts it. In many ways, Renaissance English economic issues are dealt with in the play, such as usury. The elemental imagery in the play showed signs of relation to gender stereotypes of England at the time the play was written, not enough to state conclusively that these stereotypes are intended in Timon's economic depiction, but worthy of attention in relation to the imagery of the play. Not only is money satirized, the uncompromising asceticism of Timon and Apemantus is sometimes presented as bizarre or humorous.

Alternatives to *Timon's* economic themes were found to compete significantly with the play's economic manifestations. These include the work's transcendental messages about looking beyond outward appearances. While depiction linked to issues of money and wealth abound in the work, depiction and themes outside of economics were found to be conveyed so movingly, and in such key positions in the work, that they rightfully merit recognition as central thematic features of *Timon*.

This thesis is not intended to deny the drama's character as a play about economics. Rather, it seeks to encourage greater recognition of other central aspects of the play, which are often neglected in commentary on the play, including that which is provided together with *Timon* in the play's prominent published issues. Thematically, *Timon* is far more than an economic work. As delineated in this thesis, central themes include matters of interpretation which encourage the audience to observe reality effectively, and to direct their perceptions beyond deceptive appearances, in the direction of deeper truths. The themes of the play also include the exploration of contrasts between

harshness and gentility, dishonesty and honesty, treachery and loyalty. In the development of the play, a transcendental experience is offered.

Although economic themes are clearly significant in *Timon*, pecuniary factors often mingle with significant alternative aspects in the drama, found in the characterization, the dialogue, the action on stage, and the poetics of the play. *Timon* is more than an economic narrative; by overly drawing attention to economic themes, other thematic aspects are slighted in the overall analysis and exegesis pertaining to this drama. *Timon's* presentation, including its critical and editorial commentary in the plays major editions, would be enhanced by taking up a discussion of these additional factors, providing a more three-dimensional perspective on the work. The alternatives to economic themes delineated in this thesis should be included to a greater extent in *Timon's* prominent commentary. This will provide a more balanced analysis of the work, providing a deeper appreciation of its spectrum of themes.

It is interesting that in the commentary on *Timon*, often focusing to a greater degree on economic aspects of the play, there tends to be more discussion of Aristotle than of Plato, for example in the introduction to the play in the Royal Shakespeare Company edition (Bate 1746). Raphael's painting, *The School of Athens* (a title it was given in a later era), painted 1510 – 11, prominently portrays Plato in the center, pointing upwards to the heavenly source of ideal harmony, and Aristotle pointing downwards to the earth to symbolize his empirical concerns. “Not only is there no suggestion of conflict between them, but by their joint dominance of the scene they represent the amalgamation of these two apparently diverse views.” (Roston 120) One might say that the view of Aristotle is found in *Timon's* economic discourse, and the alternative view of Plato is found in the play's transcendental themes. Just as Raphael unifies two seemingly opposing perspectives, so too does Shakespeare in *The Life of Timon of Athens*.

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